A. P. Herbert

THE SECRET BATTLE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BOMBER GIPSY AND OTHER POEMS
'LIGHT ARTICLES ONLY'
THE WHEREFORE AND THE WHY
'TINKER, TAILOR . . .'
THE HOUSE BY THE RIVER
THE OLD FLAME
THE MAN ABOUT TOWN
LAUGHING ANN
SHE SHANTIES
PLAIN JANE
MISLEADING CASES IN THE COMMON LAW

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A. P. HERBERT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY THE RIGHT HON.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

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INTRODUCTION

BY

THE RIGHT HON. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

(*Secretary of State for War*, 1918–1921)

THIS story of a valiant heart tested to destruction took rank when it was first published a few months after the Armistice, as one of the most moving of the novels produced by the war. It was at that time a little swept aside by the revulsion of the public mind from anything to do with the awful period just ended. But on re-reading it nine years later it seems to hold its place, and indeed a permanent place, in war literature. It was one of those cries of pain wrung from the fighting troops by the prolonged and measureless torment through which they passed; and like the poems of Siegfried Sassoon should be read in each generation, so that men and women may rest under no illusion about what war means. In 1919 it was first and foremost a chronicle valued for the sober truth of its descriptions and its narration of what might

happen to a gallant soldier borne down by stresses incredible to those who have not endured them, and caught in the steel teeth of the military machine.

The tale is founded on fact. Nevertheless, as the writer has been careful to make clear, it is not an authentic account. All the facts on which it rests happened, and many of them happened in combination to a very large number of young men who fought for us or who fought against us, and to those who loved them. But they did not all happen to the same man ; or in so far as they fell upon one individual, the emphasis and setting were not the same. It can now be judged from a more detached, and in some respects more exacting, standpoint as a work of art. It is a monument of the agony, not of one but of millions, standing impassive in marble to give its message to all wayfarers who pass it. It speaks to the uninformed, to the unimaginative, to the headstrong, and to the short-memoried folk who need a word of warning on their path. It speaks also with that strange note of consolation, often underlying tragedy, to those who know only too well and can never forget. To a new generation of ardent,

virile youth it can do no harm. They will not be deterred by its story from doing their duty by their native land, if ever the need should come. They will face terrors and tortures, if need be, with the simple faith that " What man has done, man can do ". Nothing but good can come in future years to those older people—if such there be—who contemplate in sluggish acquiescence and airy detachment wars in which they will themselves bear no part. And piercing Complacency with barbed dart, it drives home the bitter invocation :

> " Pray you'll never know
> The hell where youth and laughter go."

The author, who himself passed not unscathed but undaunted through much and some of the worst of what he describes, develops his tale with the measured fatefulness of a Greek tragedy. But here the pathos is all the greater because there is no element of Nemesis. The hero-victim is never anything but modest and dutiful : he always tries his best to do his bit. It is only the cruelty of chance which finally puts his life and his honour in the hands of the two men whose vanity he had offended.

He had much to give. He gave it all. But a blind Fate declared it was not enough.

The restraint with which the author bridles his mercilessly gathered argument at every stage enables him to produce the climax in the very lowest key; and the reader is left to bear or express his own feelings as best he may. It is a soldier's tale cut in stone to melt all hearts.

THE SECRET BATTLE

I

I AM going to write down some of the history of Harry Penrose, because I do not think full justice has been done to him, and because there must be many other young men of his kind who flung themselves into this war at the beginning of it, and have gone out of it after many sufferings with the unjust and ignorant condemnation of their fellows. At times, it may be, I shall seem to digress into the dreary commonplaces of all war-chronicles, but you will never understand the ruthless progression of Penrose's tragedy without some acquaintance with each chapter of his life in the army.

He joined the battalion only a few days before we left Plymouth for Gallipoli, a shy, intelligent-looking person, with smooth, freckled skin and quick, nervous movements; and although he was at once posted to my company we had not become at all intimate when we steamed at last

into Mudros Bay. But he had interested me from the first, and at intervals in the busy routine of a troopship passing without escort through submarine waters I had been watching him and delighting in his keenness and happy disposition.

It was not my first voyage through the Mediterranean, though it was the first I had made in a transport, and I liked to see my own earlier enthusiasm vividly reproduced in him. Cape Spartel and the first glimpse of Africa; Tangiers and Tarifa and all that magical hour's steaming through the narrow waters with the pink and white houses hiding under the hills; Gibraltar Town shimmering and asleep in the noonday sun; Malta and the bumboat women, carozzes swaying through the narrow, chattering streets; cool drinks at cafés in a babel of strange tongues; all these were to Penrose part of the authentic glamour of the East; and he said so. I might have told him, with the fatuous pomp of wider experience, that they were in truth but a very distant reflection of the genuine East; but I did not. For it was refreshing to see any one so frankly confessing to the sensations of adventure and romance. To other members of the officers' mess the spectacle of Gibraltar from the sea may have been more stimulating than the spectacle of Southend (though this is doubtful); but it is

certain that few of them would have admitted the impeachment.

At Malta some of us spent an evening ashore, and sat for a little in a tawdry, riotous little café, where two poor singing women strove vainly to make themselves heard above the pandemonium of clinked glasses and bawled orders; there we met many officers newly returned from the landing at Cape Helles, some of them with slight bodily wounds, but all of them with grievous injury staring out of their eyes. Those of them who would speak at all were voluble with anecdotes of horror and blood. Most of our own party had not yet lost the light-hearted mood in which men went to the war in those days; the 'picnic' illusion of war was not yet dispelled; also, individually, no doubt, we had that curious confidence of the unblooded soldier that none of these strange, terrible things could ever actually happen to *us*; we should for ever hang upon the pleasant fringes of war, sailing in strange seas, and drinking in strange towns, but never definitely entangled in the more crude and distasteful circumstances of battle. And if there were any of us with a secret consciousness that we deceived ourselves, to-night was no time to tear away the veil. Let there be lights and laughter and wine; to-morrow, if need be, let us be told how the wounded had drowned in the wired

shallows, and reckon the toll of that unforgettable exploit and the terrors that were still at work. And so we would not be dragooned into seriousness by these messengers from the Peninsula; but rather, with no injury to their feelings, laughed at their croakings and continued to drink.

But Harry Penrose was different. He was all eagerness to hear every detail, hideous and heroic.

There was one officer present, from the 29th Division, a man about forty, with a tanned, melancholy face and great solemn eyes, which, for all the horrors he related, seemed to have something yet more horrible hidden in their depths. Him Harry plied with questions, his reveller's mood flung impatiently aside; and the man seemed ready to tell him things, though from his occasional reservations and sorrowful smile I knew that he was pitying Harry for his youth, his eagerness, and his ignorance.

Around us were the curses of overworked waiters, and the babble of loud conversations, and the smell of spilt beer; there were two officers uproariously drunk, and in the distance pathetic snatches of songs were heard from the struggling singer on the dais. We were in one of the first outposts of the Empire, and halfway to one of her greatest adventures. And this excited youth at my side was the only one of all

that throng who was ready to hear the truth of it, and to speak of death. I lay emphasis on this incident, because it well illustrates his attitude towards the war at that time (which too many have now forgotten), and because I then first found the image which alone reflects the many curiosities of his personality.

He was like an imaginative, inquisitive child ; a child that cherishes a secret gallery of pictures in its mind, and must continually be feeding this storehouse with new pictures of the unknown ; that is not content with a vague outline of something that is to come, a dentist, or a visit, or a doll, but will not rest till the experience is safely put away in its place, a clear, uncompromising picture, to be taken down and played with at will.

Moreover, he had the fearlessness of a child —but I shall come to that later.

And so we came to Mudros, threading a placid way between the deceitful Aegean Islands. Harry loved them because they wore so green and inviting an aspect, and again I did not undeceive him and tell him how parched and austere, how barren of comfortable grass and shade he would find them on closer acquaintance. We steamed into Mudros Bay at the end of an unbelievable sunset ; in the great harbour were gathered regiments of ships— battleship, cruiser, tramp, transport, and

trawler, and as the sun sank into the western hills, the masts and the rigging of all of them were radiant with its last rays, while all their decks and hulls lay already in the soft blue dusk. There is something extraordinarily soothing in the almost imperceptible motion of a big steamer gliding at slow speed to her anchorage; as I leaned over the rail of the boat-deck and heard the tiny bugle-calls float across from the French or English warships, and watched the miniature crews at work upon their decks, I became aware that Penrose was similarly engaged close at hand, and it seemed to me an opportunity to learn something of the history of this strange young man.

Beginning with his delight in the voyage and all the marvellous romance of our surroundings, I led him on to speak of himself. Both his parents had died when he was a boy at school. They had left him enough to go to Oxford upon (without the help of the Exhibition he had won), and he had but just completed his second year there when the war broke out. For some mysterious reason he had immediately enlisted instead of applying for a commission, like his friends. I gathered—though not from anything he directly said—that he had had a hard time in the ranks. The majority of his companions in training had come down from the north with the first draft of Tynesiders; and

though, God knows, the Tynesider as a fighting man has been unsurpassed in this war, they were a wild, rough crowd before they became soldiers, and I can understand that for a high-strung, sensitive boy of his type the intimate daily round of eating, talking, and sleeping with them, must have made large demands on his patriotism and grit. But he said it did him good; and it was only the pestering of his guardian and relations that after six months forced him to take a commission. He had a curious lack of confidence in his fitness to be an officer—a feeling which is deplorably absent in hundreds not half as fit as he was; but from what I had seen of his handling of his platoon on the voyage (and the men are difficult after a week or two at sea) I was able to assure him that he need have no qualms. He was, I discovered, pathetically full of military ambitions; he dreamed already, he confessed, of decorations and promotions and glorious charges. In short, he was like many another undergraduate officer of those days in his eagerness and readiness for sacrifice, but far removed from the common type in his romantic, imaginative outlook towards the war. 'Romantic' is the only word, I think, and it is melancholy for me to remember that even then I said to myself, 'I wonder how long the romance will last, my son.'

But I could not guess just how terrible was to be its decay.

II

We were not to be long at Mudros. For three days we lay in the sweltering heat of the great hill-circled bay, watching the warships come and go, and buying fruit from the little Greek sailing boats which fluttered round the harbour. These were days of hot anxiety about one's kit; hourly each officer reorganized and redisposed his exiguous belongings, and re-weighed his valise, and jettisoned yet more precious articles of comfort, lest the weight regulations be violated and for the sake of an extra shirt the whole of one's equipment be cast into the sea by the mysterious figure we believed to watch over these things. Afterwards we found that all our care was in vain, and in the comfortless camps of the Peninsula bitterly bewailed the little luxuries we had needlessly left behind, there so unattainable. Down in the odorous troop-decks the men wrote long letters describing the battles in which they were already engaged, and the sound of mythical guns.

But on the third day came our sailing orders. In the evening a little trawler, promoted to the dignity of a fleet-sweeper, came alongside, and

all the regiment of gross, overloaded figures, festooned with armament and bags of food, and strange, knobbly parcels, tumbled heavily over the side. Many men have written of the sailing of the first argosy of troopships from that bay; and by this time the spectacle of departing troops was an old one to the vessels there. But this did not diminish the quality of their farewells. The rails of the King's ships were thick with men as we passed, and they sent us a great wave of cheering that filled the heart with sadness and resolution.

In one of the French ships was a party of her crew high up somewhere above the deck, and they sang for us with surprising precision and feeling the 'Chant du Départ'; so moving was this that even the stolid Northerners in our sweeper were stirred to make some more articulate acknowledgment than the official British cheer; and one old pitman, searching among his memories of some Lancashire music-hall, dug out a rough version of the 'Marseillaise.' By degrees all our men took up the tune and sang it mightily, with no suspicion of words; and the officers, not less timidly, joined in, and were proud of the men for what they had done. For many were moved in that moment who were never moved before. But while we were yet warm with cheering and the sense of knighthood, we cleared the boom and

shivered a little in the breeze of the open sea.

The sun went down, and soon it was very cold in the sweeper: and in each man's heart I think there was a chill. There were no more songs, but the men whispered in small groups, or stood silent, shifting uneasily their wearisome packs. For now we were indeed cut off from civilization and committed to the unknown. The transport we had left seemed a very haven of comfort and security; one thought longingly of white tables in the saloon, and the unfriendly linen bags of bully-beef and biscuits we carried were concrete evidence of a new life. The war seemed no longer remote, and each of us realized indignantly that we were personally involved in it. So for a little all these soldiers had a period of serious thought unusual in the soldier's life. But as we neared the Peninsula the excitement and novelty and the prospect of exercising cramped limbs brought back valour and cheerfulness.

At Malta we had heard many tales of the still terrifying ordeal of landing under fire. But such terrors were not for us. There was a bright moon, and, as we saw the pale cliffs of Cape Helles, all, I think, expected each moment a torrent of shells from some obscure quarter. But instead an unearthly stillness brooded over the two bays, and only a Morse lamp blinking

at the sweeper suggested that any living thing was there. There came over the water a strange musty smell; some said it was the smell of the dead, and some the smell of an incinerator; myself I do not know, but it was the smell of the Peninsula for ever, which no man can forget. We disembarked at a pier of rafts by the *River Clyde*, and stumbled eagerly ashore. And now we were in the very heart of heroic things. Nowhere, I think, was the new soldier plunged so suddenly into the genuine scenes of war as he was at Gallipoli; in France there was a long transition of training-camps and railway trains and billets, and he moved by easy gradations to the firing-line. But here, a few hours after a night in linen sheets, we stood suddenly on the very sand where, but three weeks before, those hideous machine-guns on the cliffs had mown down that immortal party of April 25. And in that silver stillness it was difficult to believe.

We shambled off up the steady slope between two cliffs, marvelling that any men could have prevailed against so perfect a 'field of fire'. By now we were very tired, and it was heavy work labouring through the soft sand. Queer, Moorish-looking figures in white robes peered at us from dark corners, and here and there a man poked a tousled head from a hole in the ground, and blinked upon our progress. Some

one remarked that it reminded him of nothing so much as the native camp at Earl's Court on a fine August evening, and that indeed was the effect.

After a little the stillness was broken by a sound which we could not conceal from ourselves was 'the distant rattle of musketry'; somewhere a gun fired startlingly; and now as we went each man felt vaguely that at any minute we might be plunged into the thick of a battle, laden as we were, and I think each man braced himself for a desperate struggle. Such is the effect of marching in the dark to an unknown destination. Soon we were halted in a piece of apparently waste land circled by trees, and ordered to dig ourselves a habitation at once, for 'in the morning' it was whispered 'the Turks search all this ground.' Everything was said in hoarse, mysterious whispers, presumably to conceal our observations from the ears of the Turks five miles away. But then we did not know they were five miles away; we had no idea where they were or where we were ourselves. Men glanced furtively at the North Star for guidance, and were pained to find that, contrary to their military teaching, it told them nothing. Even the digging was carried on a little stealthily till it was discovered that the Turks were not behind those trees. The digging was a comfort

to the men, who, being pitmen, were now in their element ; and the officers found solace in whispering to each other that magical communication about the expected 'searching' ; it was the first technical word they had used 'in the field,' and they were secretly proud to know what it meant.

In a little the dawn began, and the grey trees took shape ; the sun came up out of Asia, and we saw at last the little sugarloaf peak of Achi Baba, absurdly pink and diminutive in the distance. A man's first frontal impression of that great rampart, with the outlying slopes masking the summit, was that it was disappointingly small ; but when he had lived under and upon it for a while, day by day, it seemed to grow in menace and in bulk, and ultimately became an overpowering monster, pervading all his life ; so that it worked upon men's nerves, and almost everywhere in the Peninsula they were painfully conscious that every movement they made could be watched from somewhere on that massive hill.

But now the kitchens had come, and there was breakfast and viscous, milkless tea. We discovered that all around our seeming solitude the earth had been peopled with sleepers, who now emerged from their holes ; there was a stir of washing and cooking and singing, and the smoke went up from the wood fires in the clear,

cool air. D Company officers made their camp under an olive-tree, with a view over the blue water to Samothrace and Imbros, and now in the early cool, before the sun had gathered his noonday malignity, it was very pleasant. At seven o'clock the 'searching' began. A mile away, on the northern cliffs, the first shell burst, stampeding a number of horses. The long-drawn warning scream and the final crash gave all the expectant battalion a faintly pleasurable thrill, and as each shell came a little nearer the sensation remained. No one was afraid; without the knowledge of experience no one could be seriously afraid on this cool, sunny morning in the grove of olive-trees. Those chill hours in the sweeper had been much more alarming. The common sensation was: 'At last I am really under fire; to-day I shall write home and tell them about it.' And then, when it seemed that the line on which the shells were falling must, if continued, pass through the middle of our camp, the firing mysteriously ceased.

Harry, I know, was disappointed; personally, I was pleased.

. . . . .

I learned more about Harry that afternoon. He had been much exhausted by the long night,

but was now refreshed and filled with an almost childish enthusiasm by the pictorial attractions of the place. For this enthusiastic soul one thing only was lacking in the site of the camp: the rise of the hill, which here runs down the centre of the Peninsula, hid from us the Dardanelles. These, he said, must immediately be viewed. It was a bright afternoon of blue skies and gentle air—not yet had the dry north-east wind come to plague us with dust-clouds—and all the vivid colours of the scene were unspoiled. We walked over the hill through the parched scrub, where lizards darted from under our feet and tortoises lay comatose in the scanty shade, and came to a kind of inland cliff, where the Turks had had many riflemen at the landing, for all the ground was littered with empty cartridges. And there was unfolded surely the most gorgeous panorama this war has provided for prosaic Englishmen to see. Below was a cool, inviting grove of imperial cypresses; all along the narrow strip between us and the shore lay the rest-lines of the French, where moved lazy figures in blue and red, and black Senegalese in many colours. To the left was the wide sweep of Morto Bay, and beyond the first section of Achi Baba rising to De Tott's Battery in terraces of olives and vines. But what caught the immediate eye, what we had come to see and had sailed hither to fight

for, was that strip of marvellously blue water before us, deep, generous blue, like a Chinese bowl. On the farther shore, towards the entrance to the Straits, we could see a wide green plain, and beyond and to the left, peak after peak of the mountains of Asia ; and far away in the middle distance there was a glint of snow from some regal summit of the Anatolian Mountains.

That wide green plain was the Plain of Troy. The scarcity of classical scholars in Expeditionary Forces, and the wearisome observations of pressmen on the subject of Troy, have combined to belittle the significance of the classical surroundings of the Gallipoli campaign. I myself am a stolid, ill-read person, but I confess that the spectacle of those historic flats was not one, in diplomatic phrase, which I could view with indifference. On Harry, ridiculously excited already, the effect was almost alarming. He became quite lyrical over two little sweepers apparently anchored near the mouth of the Straits. 'That,' he said, 'must have been where the Greek fleet lay. God! it 's wonderful.' Up on the slope towards De Tott's Battery the guns were busy, and now and then Asiatic Annie sent over a large shell from the region of Achilles' tomb, which burst ponderously in the sea off Cape Helles. And there we sat on the stony edge of the cliff and

talked of Achilles and Hector and Diomed and Patroclus and the far-sounding bolts of Jove. I do not defend or exalt this action; but this is a truthful record of a man's personality, and I simply state what occurred. And I confess that with the best wish in the world I was myself becoming a little bored with Troy, when in the middle of a sentence he suddenly became silent and gazed across the Straits with a fixed, pinched look in his face, like a man who is reminded of some far-off calamity he had forgotten. For perhaps a minute he maintained this rigid aspect, and then as suddenly relaxed, murmuring in a tone of inflexible determination, 'I will.' It was not in me not to inquire into the nature of this passionate intention, and somehow I induced him to explain.

It seemed that in spite of his genuine academic successes and a moderate popularity at school and at Oxford he had suffered from early boyhood from a curious distrust of his own capacity in the face of anything he had to do. In a measure, no doubt, this had even contributed to his successes. For his nervousness took the form of an intimate, silent brooding over any ordeal that lay before him, whether it was a visit to his uncle, or 'Schools,' or a dance: he would lie awake for hours imagining all conceivable forms of error and failure and

humiliation that might befall him in his endeavour. And though he was to this extent forewarned and forearmed, it must have been a painful process. And it explained to me the puzzling intervals of melancholy which I had seen darkening his usually cheerful demeanour.

'You remember last night,' he said, 'I had been detailed to look after the baggage when we disembarked, and take charge of the unloading party? As far as I know I did the job all right, except for losing old Tompkins' valise—but you can't think how much worry and anxiety it gave me *beforehand*. All the time on the sweeper I was imagining the hundreds of possible disasters: the working-party not turning up, and me left alone on the boat with the baggage—the Colonel's things being dropped overboard—a row with the M.L.O.—getting the baggage ashore, and then losing the battalion, or the working-party, or the baggage. It all worked out quite simply, but I tell you, Benson, it gave me hell. And it 's always the same. That 's really why I didn't take a commission—because I couldn't imagine myself drilling men once without becoming a permanent laughing-stock. I know now that I was a fool about that—I usually do find that out—but I can't escape the feeling next time.

'And now, it 's not only little things like that, but that 's what I feel about the whole

war. I 've a terror of being a failure in it, a failure out here—you know, a sort of regimental dud. I 've heard of lots of them ; the kind of man that nobody gives an important job because he 's sure to muck it up (though I do believe Eccleston 's more likely to be that than me). But that 's what I was thinking just now. Somehow, looking at this view—Troy and all that—and thinking how those Greeks sweated blood for ten years on afternoons like this, doing their duty for the damned old kings, and how we 've come out here to fight in the same place thousands of years afterwards, and we still know about them and remember their names—well, it gave me a kind of inspiration ; I don't know why. I 've got a bit of confidence —God knows how long it will last—but I swear I won't be a failure, I won't be the battalion dud—and I 'll have a damned good try to get a medal of some sort and be like—like Achilles or somebody.'

Sheer breathlessness put a sudden end to this outburst, and since it was followed by a certain shyness at his own revelations I did not probe deeper. But I thought to myself that this young man's spirit of romance would die hard ; I did not know whether it would ever die ; for certainly I had never seen that spirit working so powerfully in any man as a living incentive to achievement. And I tell you all

this, because I want you to understand how it was with him in the beginning.

But now the bay was in shadow below us; on the hill the solemn stillness that comes over all trenches in the hour before dusk had already descended, and away towards the cape the Indians were coming out to kneel in prayer beside the alien sea.

The Romance of War was in full song. And, scrambling down the cliff, we bathed almost reverently in the Hellespont.

II

THOSE first three days were for many of us, who did not know the mild autumn months, the most pleasant we spent on the Peninsula. The last weeks of May had something of the quality of an old English summer, and the seven plagues of the Peninsula had not yet attained the intolerable violence of June and July. True, the inhabited portion of the narrow land we had won already was a wilderness; the myrtle, and rock-rose, and tangled cistus, and all that wealth of spring flowers in which the landing parties had fallen and died in April, had long been trodden to death, and there were wide stretches of yellow desert where not even the parched scrub survived. But in the two and a half miles of bare country which lay between the capes and the foot-hills of Achi Baba was one considerable oasis of olives and stunted oaks, and therein, on the slopes of the ridge, was our camp fortunately set. The word 'camp' contains an unmerited compliment to the place. The manner of its birth was characteristic of military arrangements in those days. When we were told, on that first mysterious midnight, to dig ourselves a shelter against the morning's

'searching,' we were far from imagining that what we dug would be our Peninsular 'home' and haven of rest from the firing-line for many months to come. And so we made what we conceived to be the quickest and simplest form of shelter against a merely temporary danger—long, straight, untraversed ditches, running parallel to and with but a few yards between each other. No worse form of permanent dwelling-place could conceivably have been constructed, for the men were cramped in these places with a minimum of comfort and a maximum of danger. No man could climb out of his narrow drain without casting a shower of dust from the crumbling parapet on to his sleeping neighbour in the next ditch; and three large German shells could have destroyed half the regiment. Yet there were many such camps, most of them lacking the grateful concealment of our trees. Such targets even the Turkish artillery must sometimes hit. There were no dug-outs in the accepted sense of the Western Front, no deep, elaborate, stair-cased chambers, hollowed out by miners with miners' material. *Our* dug-outs *were* dug-outs in truth, shallow excavations scooped in the surface of the earth. The only roof for a man against sun and shells was a waterproof sheet stretched precariously over his hole. It is sufficient testimony to the poverty of the

Turkish artillery that with such naked concentrations of men scattered about the Peninsula, casualties in the rest-camps were so few.

Each officer had his own private hole, set democratically among the men's; and an officers' mess was simply made by digging a larger hole, and roofing it with *two* waterproof sheets instead of one. There was no luxury among the infantry there, and the gulf which yawned between the lives of officer and man in France in the way of material comfort was barely discernible in Gallipoli. Food was dull and monotonous: for weeks we had only bully-beef and biscuits, and a little coarse bacon and tea, but it was the same for all, one honourable equality of discomfort. At first there were no canteen supplies, and when some newcomer came from one of the islands with a bottle of champagne and another of chartreuse, we drank them with 'bully' and cast-iron biscuit. Drinking water was as precious as the elixir of life, and almost as unobtainable, but officer and man had the same ration to eke out through the thirsty day. Wells were sunk, and sometimes immediately condemned, and when we knew the water was clear and sweet to taste, it was hard to have it corrupted with the metallic flavour of chemicals by the medical staff. Then indeed did a man learn to love water; then did he learn discipline,

when he filled his water-bottle in the morning with the exiguous ration of the day, and fought with the desperate craving to put it to his lips and there and then gurgle down his fill.

In the spring nights it was very cold, and men shivered in their single blanket under the unimaginable stars; but very early the sun came up, and by five o'clock all the camp were singing; and there were three hours of fresh coolness when it was very good to wash in a canvas bucket, and smoke in the sun before the torrid time came on; and again at seven, when the sun sat perched on the great rock of Samothrace, and Imbros was set in a fleecy bed of pink and saffron clouds, there were two hours of pure physical content; but these, I think, were more nearly perfect than the morning because they succeeded the irritable fevers of the day. Then the crickets in the branches sang less tediously, and the flies melted away, and all over the Peninsula the wood fires began to twinkle in the dusk, as the men cooked over a few sticks the little delicacies which were preserved for this hour of respite. When we had done we sat under our olive-tree in the clear twilight, and watched the last aeroplanes sail home to Rabbit Islands, and talked and argued till the glow-worms glimmering in the scrub, and up the hill the long roll of the Turks' rapid fire, told us that darkness was at

hand, and the chill dew sent us into our crannies to sleep.

So we were not sorry for three days of quiet in the camp before we went up the hill; Harry alone was all eagerness to reach the firing-line with the least possible delay. But then Harry was like none of us; indeed, none of us were like each other. It would have been strange if we had been. War-chroniclers have noted with an accent of astonishment the strange diversity of persons to be found in units of the New Army, and the essential sameness of their attitude to the war. As if a man were to go into the Haymarket and be surprised if the first twelve pedestrians there were not of the same profession; were then to summon them to the assistance of a woman in the hands of a rough, and be still surprised at the similarity of their methods.

We were, in truth, a motley crowd, gathered from everywhere; but when we sat under that olive-tree we were very much alike—with the single exception of Harry.

Egerton, our company commander, a man of about thirty, with a round face, and a large head, was a stockbroker by profession, and, rather improbably, an old Territorial by pastime. He was an excellent company commander, but would have made a still more admirable second-in-command, for his training

in figures and his meticulous habits in such things as the keeping of accounts were just what are required of a second-in-command and were lamentably deficient in myself. The intricacies of Acquittance Rolls and Imprest Accounts, and page 3 of the Soldier's Pay-Book, were meat and drink to him, and in general I must confess that I shamefully surrendered such dainties to him.

Harry Penrose had the 14th Platoon. Of the other three subalterns perhaps the most interesting was Hewett. He, like Harry, had been at Oxford before the war, though they had never come together there. He was a fair, dreamy person, of remarkably good looks. Alone of all the 'young Apollos' I have known did he at all deserve that title. Most of these have been men of surpassing stupidity and material tastes, but Hewett added to his physical qualifications something of the mental fineness which presumably one should expect of even a modern Apollo. Intensely fastidious, he frankly detested the war, and all the dirt and disgust he must personally encounter. Like Harry, he was an idealist—but more so; for he could not idealize the war. But the shrinking of his spirit had no effect on his conduct: he was no less courageous than Harry or any one else, and no less keen to see the thing through. Only, at that time, he was

a little less blind. A year senior to Harry, he had taken Greats in 1914, and though his degree had been disappointingly low he had not yet lost the passionate attachment of the 'Greats' man to philosophy and thoughts of the Ultimate Truths. Sometimes he would try to induce one of us to talk with him of his religious and philosophical doubts; but in that feverish place it was too difficult for us, and usually he brooded over his problems alone.

Eustace, of the 16th Platoon, was a journalist by repute, though it was never discovered to what journal, if any, he was specially attached. His character was more attractive than his appearance, which was long, awkward, and angular; and if he had ever been to school, he would have been quite undeservedly unpopular for not playing games: undeservedly—because one could not conceive of him as playing any game. Physically, indeed, he was one of Nature's gawks; intellectually he was nimble, not to say athletic, with an acute and deeply logical mind. As a companion, more especially a companion in war, he was made sometimes tedious by a habit of cynicism and a passion for argument. The cynicism, I think, had developed originally from some early grievance against Society, had been adopted as an effective pose, and had now become part of his nature.

Whatever its origin it was wearing to us, for in the actual scenes of war one likes to cling to one's illusions while any shred of them remains, and would rather they faded honourably under the gentle influence of time than be torn to fragments in a moment by reasoned mockery. But Eustace was never tired of exhibiting the frailty and subterfuge of all men, particularly in their relations to the war; the *Nation* arrived for him as regularly as the German submarines would allow, and all his views were in that sense distinctly 'National.' If any of us were rash enough to read that paper ourselves, we were inevitably provoked to some comment which led to a hot wrangle on the Public Schools, or Kitchener, or the rights of the war, and the pleasant calm of the dusk was marred. For Eustace could always meet us with a powerfully logical case, and while in spirit we revolted against his heresies, we were distressed by the appeal they made to our reluctant reasons. Harry, the most ingenuous of us all and the most devoted to his illusions, was particularly worried by this conflict. It seemed very wrong to him that a man so loyal and gallant in his personal relations with others should trample so ruthlessly on their dearest opinions.

Burnett was of a very different type. Tall and muscular, with reddish hair and vivid blue

eyes, he looked (as he wanted to look) a 'man of action' by nature and practice. He had 'knocked about' for some years in Africa and Australia (a process which had failed equally to establish his fortunes or soften his rough edges), and from the first he affected the patronizing attitude of the experienced campaigner. The little discomforts of camp life were nothing to him, for were they not part of his normal life? And when I emerged from my dug-out pursued, as I thought, by a ferocious centipede, he held forth for a long time on the best method of dispatching rattlesnakes in the Umgoga, or some such locality. By degrees, however, as life became more unbearable, the conviction dawned upon us that he was no less sensible to heat and hunger and thirst than mere 'temporary' campaigners, and rather more ready to utter his complaints. Finally, the weight of evidence became overwhelming, and it was whispered at the end of our first week at Gallipoli that 'Burnett was bogus.' The quality of being 'bogus' was in those days the last word in military condemnation; and in Burnett's case events showed the verdict to be lamentably correct.

So we were a strangely assorted crowd, only alike, as I have said, in that we were keen on the winning of this war and resolved to do our personal best towards that end. Of the five of

us, Hewett and Eustace had the most influence on Harry. Me he regarded as a solid kind of wall that would never let him down, or be guilty of any startling deviations from the normal. By Hewett he was personally and spiritually attracted; by Eustace alternately fascinated and disturbed. And it was a very bad day for Harry when Hewett's death removed that gentle, comfortable influence.

II

We were ordered to relieve the ——'s at midnight on the fourth day, and once again we braced ourselves for the last desperate battle of our lives. All soldiers go through this process during their first weeks of active service every time they 'move' anywhere. Immense expectations, vows, fears, prayers, fill their minds; and nothing particular happens. Only the really experienced soldier knows that it is the exception and not the rule for anything particular to happen; and the heroes of romance and history who do not move a muscle when told that they are to attack at dawn are generally quite undeserving of praise, since long experience has taught them that the attack is many times more likely to be cancelled than to occur. Until it actually does happen they will not believe in it; they make all

proper preparations, but quite rightly do not move a muscle. We, however, were now to have our first illustration of this great military truth. For, indeed, we were to have no battle. Yet that night's march to the trenches was an experience that made full compensation. It was already dusk when we moved out of the rest-camp, and the moon was not up. As usual in new units, the leading platoons went off at a reckless canter, and stumbling after them in the gathering shadows over rocky, precipitous slopes, and in and out of the clumps of bush, falling in dark holes on to indignant sleepers, or maddeningly entangled in hidden strands of wire, the rear companies were speedily out of touch. To a heavily laden infantryman there are few things more exasperating than a night march into the line conducted too fast. If the country be broken and strewn with obstacles, at which each man must wait while another climbs or drops or wrestles or wades in front of him, and must then laboriously scamper after him in the shadows lest he, and thereby all those behind him, be lost; if the country be unknown to him, so that, apart from purely military considerations, the fear of being lost is no small thing, for a man knows that he may wander all night alone in the dark, surrounded by unknown dangers, cut off from sleep, and rations, and the friendly voices of companions,

a jest among them when he discovers them: then such a march becomes a nightmare.

On this night it dawned gradually on those in front that they were unaccompanied save by the 1st platoon, and a long halt, and much shouting and searching, gathered most of the regiment together, hot, cursing, and already exhausted. And now we passed the five white Water Towers, standing mysteriously in a swamp, and came out of the open country into the beginning of a gully. These 'gullies' were deep, steep-sided ravines, driven through all the lower slopes of Achi Baba, and carrying in the spring a thin stream of water, peopled by many frogs, down to the Straits or the sea. It was easier going here, for there was a rough track beside the stream to follow; yet, though those in front were marching, as they thought, with unnecessary deliberation, the rear men of each platoon were doubling round the corners among the trees, and cursing as they ran. There was then a wild hail of bullets in all those gullies, since for many hours of each night the Turk kept up a sustained and terrible rapid fire from his trenches far up the hill, and, whether by design or bad shooting, the majority of these bullets passed high over our trenches, and fell hissing in the gully-bed.

So now all the air seemed full of the humming, whistling things, and all round in the gully-banks

and the bushes by the stream there were vicious spurts as they fell. It was always a marvel how few casualties were caused by this stray fire, and to-night we were chiefly impressed with this wonder. In the stream the frogs croaked incessantly with a note of weary indifference to the medley of competing noises. At one point there was a kind of pot-hole in the stream where the water squeezing through made a kind of high-toned wail, delivered with stabbing emphasis at regular intervals. So weird was this sound, which could be heard many hundred yards away and gradually asserted itself above all other contributions to that terrible din, that many of the men, already mystified and excited, said to themselves that this was the noise of the explosive bullets of which they had heard.

Soon we were compelled to climb out of the gully-path to make way for some descending troops, and stumbled forward with a curious feeling of nakedness high up in open ground. Here the bullets were many times multiplied, and many of us said that we could feel them passing between us. Indeed, one or two men were hit, but though we did not know it most of these near-sounding bullets flew high above us. After a little we were halted, and lay down, wondering, in the sibilant dark ; then we moved on and halted again, and realized suddenly that

we were very tired. At the head of the column the guide had lost his way, and could not find the entrance to the communication trench; and here in the most exposed area of all that Peninsula we must wait until he did. The march was an avoidable piece of mismanagement; the whole regiment was being unnecessarily endangered. But none of this we knew; so very few men were afraid. We were still in the bliss of ignorance. It seemed to us that these strange proceedings must be a part of the everyday life of the soldier. If they were not, we raw creatures should not have been asked to endure them. We had no standard of safety or danger by which to estimate our position; and so the miraculous immunity we were enjoying was taken as a matter of course, and we were blissfully unafraid. At the same time we were extremely bored and tired, and the sweat cooled on us in the chill night air. And when at last we came into the deep communication trench we felt that the end of this weariness must surely be near. But the worst exasperations of relieving an unknown line were still before us. It was a two-mile trudge in the narrow ditches to the front line. No war correspondent has ever described such a march; it is not included in the official 'horrors of war'; but this is the kind of thing which, more than battle and blood, harasses the spirit

of the infantryman, and composes his life. The communication trenches that night were good and deep and dry, and free from the awfulness of mud; but they were very few, and unintelligently used. There had been an attack that day, and coming by the same trench was a long stream of stretchers and wounded men, and odd parties coming to fetch water from the well, and whole battalions relieved from other parts of the line. Our men had been sent up insanely with full packs; for a man so equipped to pass another naked in the narrow ditch would have been difficult; when all those that he meets have also straps and hooks and excrescences about them, each separate encounter means heart-breaking entanglements and squeezes and sudden paroxysms of rage. That night we stood a total of hours hopelessly jammed in the suffocating trench, with other troops trying to get down. A man stood in those crushes, unable to sit down, unable to lean comfortably against the wall because of his pack, unable even to get his hand to his water-bottle and quench his intolerable thirst, unable almost to breathe for the hot smell of herded humanity. Only a thin ribbon of stars overhead, remotely roofing his prison, reminded him that indeed he was still in the living world and not pursuing some hideous nightmare. At long last some one

would take charge of the situation, and by sheer muscular fighting for space the two masses would be extricated. Then we moved on again. And now each man has become a mere lifeless automaton. Every few yards there is a wire hanging across the trench at the height of a man's eyes, and he runs blindly into it, or it catches in the piling-swivel of his rifle; painfully he removes it, or in a fit of fury tears the wire away with him. Or there is a man lying in a corner with a wounded leg crying out to each passer-by not to tread on him, or a stretcher party slowly struggling against the tide. Mechanically each man grapples with these obstacles, mechanically repeats the ceaseless messages that are passed up and down, and the warning 'Wire,' 'Stretcher party,' 'Step up,' to those behind, and stumbles on. He is only conscious of the dead weight of his load, and the braces of his pack biting into his shoulders, of his thirst, and the sweat of his body, and the longing to lie down and sleep. When we halt men fall into a doze as they stand and curse pitifully when they are urged on from behind.

We reach the inhabited part of the line, and the obstacles become more frequent, for there are traverses every ten yards and men sleeping on the floor, and a litter of rifles, water-cans, and scattered equipment. For ever we wind

round the endless traverses, and squeeze past the endless host we are relieving; and sometimes the parapet is low or broken or thin, or there is a dangerous gap, and we are told to keep our heads down, and dully pass back the message so that it reaches men meaninglessly when they have passed the danger-point, or are still far from it. All the time there is a wild rattle of rapid fire from the Turks, and bullets hammer irritably on the parapet, or fly singing overhead. When a man reached his destined part of the trench that night there were still long minutes of exasperation before him; for we were inexperienced troops, and first of all the men crowded in too far together, and must turn about, and press back so as to cover the whole ground to be garrisoned; then they would flock like sad sheep too far in the opposite direction. This was the subaltern's bad time; for the officer must squeeze backwards and forwards, struggling to dispose properly his own sullen platoon, and it was hard for him to be patient with their stupidity, for, like them, he only longed to fling off his cursed equipment and lie down and sleep for ever. He, like them, had but one thought, that if there were to be no release from the hateful burden that clung to his back, and cut into his shoulders and ceaselessly impeded him, if there were to be no relief for his thirst and the urgent aching

of all his body—he must soon sink down and curse like a fool.

III

Harry's platoon was settled in when I found him, hidden away somewhere in the third (Reserve) line. He had conscientiously posted a few sentries, and done all those things which a good platoon commander should do, and was lying himself in a sort of stupor of fatigue. Physically he was not strong, rather frail, in fact, for the infantry ; he had a narrow chest and slightly round shoulders, and his heart would not have passed a civilian doctor ; and—from my own experience—I knew that the march must have tried him terribly. But a little rest had soothed the intense nervous irritation whose origins I have tried to describe, and his spirit was as sturdy as ever. He struggled to his feet and leaned over the parados with me. The moon was now high up in the north-east ; the Turks had ceased their rapid fire at moonrise, and now an immense peace wrapped the Peninsula. We were high up on the centre slopes of Achi Baba, and all the six miles which other men had conquered lay bathed in moonlight below us. Far away at the cape we could see the long, green lights of the hospital ships, and all

about us were glow-worms in the scrub. Left and right the pale parapets of trenches crept like dim-seen snakes into the little valleys, and vanished over the opposite slopes. Only a cruiser off-shore firing lazily at long intervals disturbed the slumberous stillness. No better sedative could have been desired.

'How did you like the march?' I said.

'Oh, all right; one of my men was wounded, I believe, but I didn't see him.'

'All right?' I said. 'Personally I thought it was damned awful; it 's a marvel that any of us are here at all. I hear A Company 's still adrift, as it is.'

'Well, anyhow *we* got here,' said Harry. 'Wonderful spot this. Look at those glow-worms.'

I was anxious to know what impression the night had made on Harry, but these and other answers gave me no real clue. I had a suspicion that it had, in truth, considerably distressed him, but any such effect had clearly given way to the romantic appeal of the quiet moon. I, too, was enjoying the sense of peace but I was still acutely conscious of the unpleasantness of the night's proceedings; and a certain envy took hold of me at this youth's capacity to concentrate on the attractive shadow of distasteful things. There was a heavy, musty smell over all this part of the

trench, the smell of a dead Turk lying just over the parapet, and it occurred to me, maliciously, to wake Harry from his dreams, and bring home to him the reality of things.

'Funny smell you 've got here, Harry,' I said; 'know what it is?'

'Yes, it 's cactus or amaryllis, or one of those funny plants they have here, isn't it? I read about it in the papers.'

This was too much. 'It 's a dead Turk,' I told him, with a wicked anticipation of the effect I should produce.

The effect, however, was not what I expected.

'No!' said Harry, with obvious elation. 'Let 's find him.'

Forthwith he swarmed over the parapet, full of life again, nosed about till he found the reeking thing, and gazed on it with undisguised interest. No sign of horror or disgust could I detect in him. Yet it was not pure ghoulishness; it was simply the boy's greed for experience and the savour of adventure—his first dead Turk. Anyhow, my experiment had failed; and I found that I was glad. But when I was leaving him for the next platoon, he was lying down for a little sleep on the dirty floor of the trench, and as he flashed his electric torch over the ground, I saw several small white objects writhing in the dust. The company commander whom we had relieved had

told me how under all these trenches the Turks and the French had buried many of their dead, and in a moment of nauseating insight I knew that these things were the maggots which fed upon their bodies.

'Harry,' I said, 'you can't sleep there; look at those things!' And I told him what they were.

'Rubbish,' he said, 'they 're glow-worms resting.'

Well, then I left him. But that 's how he was in those days.

III

So many men have written descriptions of trench life in France; there have been so many poems, plays, and speeches about it that the majority of our nation must have a much clearer mental picture of life on the Western Front than they have of life at the Savoy, or life in East Ham. But the Gallipoli Peninsula was never part of the Western Front, and no man came back from that place on leave; lucky, indeed, if he came at all. The campaign was never, for obvious reasons, an important item in official propaganda, and the various non-official agencies which now bring home the war to Streatham had not begun to articulate when the campaign came to an end. And so neither Streatham nor any one else knew anything about it. And though for a soldier to speak, however distantly, of the details of trench life in France, is now in some circles considered a solecism equivalent to the talking of 'shop,' I hope I may still without offence make some brief reference to the trenches of the Peninsula. For, in truth, it was all very different. Above all, from dawn to dawn it was genuine infantry warfare. In France, apart from full-dress attacks, an

infantryman may live for many months without once firing his rifle, or running the remotest risk of death by a rifle bullet. Patiently he tramps, and watches, and digs, and is shelled, clinging fondly to his rifle night and day, but seldom or never in a position to use it; so that in the stagnant days of the past he came to look upon it as a mere part of his equipment, like his water-bottle, only heavier and less comforting; and in real emergencies fumbled stupidly with the unfamiliar mechanism. This was true for a long time of the normal, or 'peace-time,' sectors of France.

But in those hill-trenches of Gallipoli the Turk and the Gentile fought with each other all day with rifle and bomb, and in the evening crept out and stabbed each other in the dark. There was no release from the strain of watching and listening and taking thought. The Turk was always on higher ground; he knew every inch of all those valleys and vineyards and scrub-strewn slopes; and he had an uncanny accuracy of aim. Moreover, many of his men had the devotion of fanatics, which inspired them to lie out behind our lines, with stores of food enough to last out their ammunition, certain only of their own ultimate destruction, but content to lie there and pick off the infidels till they too died. They were very brave men. But the Turkish snipers were not

confined to the madmen who were caught disguised as trees in the broad daylight and found their way into the picture papers. Every trench was full of snipers, less theatrical but no less effective. And in the night they crept out with inimitable stealth and lay close in to our lines, killing our sentries, and chipping away our crumbling parapets.

So the sniping was terrible. In that first week we lost twelve men each day; they fell without a sound in the early morning as they stood up from their cooking at the brazier, fell shot through the head, and lay snoring horribly in the dust; they were sniped as they came up the communication trench with water, or carelessly raised their heads to look back at the ships in the bay; and in the night there were sudden screams where a sentry had moved his head too often against the moon. If a periscope were raised, however furtively, it was shivered in an instant; if a man peered over himself, he was dead. Far back in the Reserve Lines or at the wells, where a man thought himself hidden from view, the sniper saw and killed him. All along the line were danger posts where many had been hit; these places became invested with a peculiar awe, and as you came to them the men said, 'Keep low here, sir,' in a reverential whisper, as though the Turk could hear them. Indeed, so

uncanny were many of the deaths, that some men said the Turk could see impossibly through the walls of the trench, and crouched nervously in the bottom. All the long communication trenches were watched, and wherever a head or a moving rifle showed at a gap a bullet came with automatic regularity. Going down a communication trench alone a man would hear the tap of these bullets on the parapet following him along, and break into a half-hysterical run in the bright sunlight to get away from this unnatural pursuit; for such it seemed to him to be.

The fire seemed to come from all angles; and units bitterly accused their neighbours of killing their men when it seemed impossible that any Turk could have fired the shot.

For a little, then, this sniping was thoroughly on the men's nerves. Nothing in their training had prepared them for it. They hated the 'blinded' feeling it produced; it was demoralizing always to be wondering if one's head was low enough, always to walk with a stoop; it was tiring to be always taking care; and it was very dangerous to relax that care for a moment. Something had to be done; and the heavy, methodical way in which these Tynesiders of ours learned to counter and finally overcome the sniper, is characteristic of the nation's effort throughout this war.

The Turks were natural soldiers, fighting in their own country; more, they were natural scouts. Our men were ponderous, uncouth pitmen from Tyneside and the Clyde. But we chose out a small body of them who could shoot better than their fellows, and called them snipers, and behold they *were* snipers. We gave them telescopes, and periscopes, and observers, and set them in odd corners, and told them to snipe. And by slow degrees they became interested and active and expert, and killed many Turks. The third time we came to those trenches we could move about with comparative freedom.

In all this Harry took a leading part, for the battalion scout officer was one of the first casualties, and Harry, who had had some training as a scout in the ranks, was appointed in his place. In this capacity he was in charge of the improvised snipers, and all day moved about the line from post to post, encouraging and correcting. All this he did with characteristic energy and enthusiasm, and tired himself out with long wanderings in the scorching sun. In those trenches all movement was an intense labour. The sun blazed always into the suffocating ditch, where no breath of air came; the men not on duty lay huddled wherever they could steal an inch of shade, with the flies crawling about their eyes and

open mouths. Progress was a weary routine of squeezing past men, or stepping over men, or running into men round corners, as one stooped to escape death. In little niches in the wall were mess-tins boiling over box-wood fires, so that the eyes smarted from their smoke, and the air was full of the hot fumes; and everywhere was the stuffy smell of human flesh. In the heat of the day these things produced in the healthiest man a fretting irritation and fatigue: to a frail, sensitive youth like Harry his day-long rambles must have been torture; but though he too became touchy he pursued his task with determination, and would not be tempted away. The rest of us, when not on watch, lay torpid all the hot hours in the shallow holes we had scratched behind the trench, and called Company Headquarters. These places were roofed only with the inevitable waterproof sheet, and, had there been any serious shelling, would have been death-traps. Into these dwellings came many strange animals, driven from their nests among the roots of the scrub—snakes, lizards, and hideous centipedes. Large, clumsy, winged things, which some said were locusts, fell into the trench, and for a few hours strove vainly to leap out again till they were trampled to death; they had the colour of ivory, and shone with bright tints in the sun like shot silk. The men

found tortoises derelict in near shell-holes, and set them to walk in the trench, and they too wandered sadly about till they disappeared, no man knew where. The flies were not yet at full strength, but they were very bad; and all day we wrestled with thirst. He was a lucky man who could sleep in the daylight hours, and when the cool evening came, beckoning him to sleep, he must rise and bestir himself for the work of the night.

Then all the line hummed with life again, with the cleaning of rifles thick with heavy dust, and the bustle of men making ready to 'Stand to Arms.' Now, indeed, could a man have slept, when all the pests of the day had been exorcized by the cool dusk, and the bitter cold of the midnight was not yet come. But there was no sleep for any man, only watching and digging and carrying and working and listening. And so soon as Achi Baba was swathed in shadow, and the sun well down behind the westward islands, the Turk began his evening fusillade of rapid fire. This was an astonishing thing. Night after night at this hour every man in his trench must have blazed away till his rifle would do its work no more. 'Rapid fire' has been a speciality of the Turkish infantryman since the days of Plevna, and he excels in it. Few English units could equal his performance for ten minutes; but the Turk

kept up the same sustained deafening volume of fire for hours at a stretch, till the moon came up and allayed his fears. For it was an exhibition of nervousness as well as musketry: fearful of a stealthy assault in the dark, he would not desist till he could see well across his own wire. Captured orders by the Turkish High Command repeatedly forbade this reckless expenditure of ammunition, and sometimes for two nights he would restrain himself, but in the early days never for more. Our policy was to lie down in the trench, and think sardonically of the ammunition he was wasting; but even this was not good for men's minds. Most of the fire was high and whizzed over into the gullies, but many hundreds of all those thousands of bullets hit the parapet. There was a steady, reiterant rap of them on the sand-bags, very irritating to the nerves, and bits of the parapet splashed viciously into the trench over the crouching men. In that tornado of sound a man must shout to make himself heard by his friends, and this produced in his mind an uncomfortable sense of isolation; he seemed cut off from humanity, and brooded secretly to himself. Safe he might be in that trench, but he could not long sit alone in that tempestuous security without imagining himself in other circumstances—climbing up the parapet—leaving the trench—walking into

THAT. So on the few murky nights when the moon would not show herself but peeped temptingly from behind large bolsters of cloud, so that even the Turks diminished their fire, and then with a petulant crescendo continued, men lay in the dust and prayed for the moon to come. So demoralizing was this fire that it was not easy to induce even sentries to keep an effective watch. Not unnaturally, they did not like lifting their heads to look over, even for the periodical peeps which were insisted upon. An officer on his rounds would find them standing on the firestep with their heads well below the parapet, but gazing intently into the heart of a sand-bag, with the air of a man whom no movement of the enemy can escape. The officer must then perform the melancholy rite of 'showing the men how safe it is.' This consisted in climbing up to the firestep, and exposing an immoderate amount of his head; gazing deliberately at the Turks, and striving to create an impression of indifference and calm. He then jumped down, shouting cheerily, 'That 's the way, Thompson,' and walked off, thanking God. Personally I did not like this duty. At the best it was an hypocrisy. For the reluctance of the officer to look over was no less acute than the man's; and it was one thing to look for a moment or two and pass on, and another to stand there and

repeat the process at brief intervals. Officers performed this rite according to their several characters: Eustace, for example, with a cynical grin which derided, with equal injustice, both himself and his action; he was notably courageous, and his nonchalance on the parapet would have been definitely reassuring to the nervous sentry. But his expression and attitude said clearly: 'This is all damned nonsense, my good man; *you* don't like standing up here, neither do I, and neither of us is deceiving the other at all.' Burnett did it with genuine and ill-concealed distaste, too hasty to be convincing. Harry, alone, did it with a gallant abandon, like a knight throwing down his challenge to the enemy; and he alone can have been really inspiring to the reluctant sentry. He had a keen dramatic instinct, and I think in these little scenes rather enjoyed the part of the unperturbed hero calming the timorous herd. Watching him once or twice I wondered how much was acting and how much real fearlessness; if it was acting he was braver then than most of us—but I think it was the other just then.

There were five or six hours between the end of the rapid fire and the 'Stand to' before dawn. During these hours three of the company officers were always on duty. We split the time in two, and it was a weary three hours

patrolling the still trench, stumbling over sleeping men, sprawled out like dead in the moonlight, and goading the tired sentries to watchfulness. Terrible was the want of sleep. The men fell asleep with their heads against the iron loopholes, and, starting up as the officer shook them, swore that they had never nodded. Only by constant movement could the officer be sure even of himself; he dared not sit for a moment or lean in the corner of the traverse, though all his limbs ached for rest, lest he, too, be found snoring at his post, and he and all his men be butchered in their guilty sleep. And so he drags his sore feet ceaselessly backwards and forwards, marvelling at the stillness and the stars and the strange musky night smell which has crept out of the earth. Far away he can see the green lights of a hospital ship, and as he looks they begin to move and dwindle slowly into the distance, for she is going home; and he thinks of the warmth and light and comfort in that ship, and follows her wistfully with his eyes till she is gone. Turning back he sees a sentry, silent above him; he, too, is watching the ship, and each man knows the other's thoughts, but they do not speak.

At last comes the officer relieving him, cold and irritable from his brief sleep. He is a little late, and they compare watches resentfully; and unless they be firm friends, at that

moment they may hate each other. But the one who is relieved goes down to the dug-out in the support line, a little jauntily now, though his feet are painful, feeling already that he could watch many hours more. And suddenly the moon is beautiful, and the stars are friendly—for he is going to sleep. But when he comes to the little narrow hole which is the dug-out, there are two officers already filling most of the floor, noisily asleep. One of them is lying on his waterproof sheet: he tugs angrily at it, but it is caught in something and will not come away. He shakes the man, but he does not wake. Too tired to persevere he lies down awkwardly in the crooked space which is left between the legs and arms and equipment of the others. He draws his meagre trench-coat over his body, and pulls his knees up that they, too, may be covered; there is nothing over his feet, and already they are cold. His head he rests on a rough army haversack. In the middle of it there is a hard knob, a soap-tin, or a book, or a tin of beef. For a little he lies uncomfortably like this, hoping for sleep; his ear is crushed on the hard pillow; there is something lumpy under his hip. He knows that he ought to get up and rearrange himself—but the effort is too much. At last he raises himself on his elbow and tugs at the towel in his haversack to make him a pillow;

the strap of the haversack is fastened, and the towel will not emerge. He unfastens the haversack, and in desperation pulls out the whole of its contents with the towel. His toothbrush and his sponge and his diary are scattered in the dust. Some of the pages of the diary are loose, and if he leaves it they will be lost ; he feels in the darkness for his electric torch, and curses because he cannot find it. He has lent it to the damned fool who relieved him. Why can't people have things of their own ?

Painfully groping he gathers his belongings and puts them, one by one, in the haversack, arranging his towel on the top. His elbow is sore with leaning on it, but the pillow is ready. Lying down again he falls quickly to sleep. Almost at once there is a wild din in his dreams. Rapid fire again. Springing up, he rushes into the trench with the others. It is an attack. Who is attacking ? The men in the trench know nothing. It started on the right, they say, and now the whole line is ablaze again with this maddening rifle-fire. Running back to the dug-out he gropes in the wreckage of coats and equipment for his belt and revolver. He must hurry to the front line to take charge of his platoon. There are no telephones to the firing-line. What the hell is happening ? When he is halfway up the

communication trench, cannoning into the walls in his haste and weariness, the firing suddenly stops. It was a wild panic started by the Senegalese holding the line on our right. Damn them—black idiots!

He goes back swearing with the other officers, and they lie down anyhow; it is too late now to waste time on fussy arrangements. When he wakes up again there is already a hint of light in the east. It is the 'Stand to Arms' before dawn. His feet are numb and painful with cold, his limbs are cramped and aching, and his right forearm has gone to sleep. The flesh of his legs is clammy, and sticks to the breeches he has lived and slept in for five days: he longs for a bath. Slowly with the others he raises himself and gropes weakly in the muddle of garments on the floor for his equipment. He cannot find his revolver. Burnett has lost his belt, and mutters angrily to himself. All their belongings are entangled together in the narrow space; they disengage them without speaking to each other. Each one is in a dull coma of endurance; for the moment their spirit is at its lowest ebb; it is the most awful moment of warfare. In a little they will revive, but just now they cannot pretend to bravery or cheerfulness, only curse feebly and fumble in the darkness.

They go out into the trench and join their

platoons. The N.C.O.'s are still shaking and bullying the men still asleep ; some of these are almost senseless, and can only be roused by prolonged physical violence. The officer braces himself for his duties, and by and by all the men are more or less awake and equipped, though their heads droop as they sit, and their neighbours nudge them into wakefulness as the officer approaches. Mechanically he fills and lights a pipe, and takes a cautious sip at his water-bottle ; the pipe turns his empty stomach, and a sickly emptiness assails him. He knocks out the pipe and peers over the parapet. It is almost light now, but a thin mist hides the Turkish trench. His face is greasy and taut with dirt, and the corners of his eyes are full of dust ; his throat is dry, and there is a loathsome stubble on his chin, which he fingers absently, pulling at the long hairs.

Steadily the light grows and grows, and the men begin to chatter, and suddenly the sun emerges over the corner of Achi Baba, and life and warmth come back to the numb souls of all these men. 'Stand to' is over ; but as the men tear off their hateful equipment and lean their rifles against the wall of the trench there is a sudden burst of shelling on the right. Figures appear running on the skyline. They are against the light, and the shapes are dark, but there seems to be a dirty blue in

their uniforms. No one quite knows how the line runs up there ; it is a salient. The figures must be Turks attacking the French. The men gape over the parapet. The officer gapes. It is nothing to do with them. Then he remembers what he is for, and tells his men excitedly to fire at the figures. Some of the men have begun cooking their breakfast, and are with difficulty seduced from their task. A spasmodic fire opens on the running figures. It is hard to say where they are running, or what they are doing. The officer is puzzled. It is his first glimpse of battle, and he feels that a battle should be simple and easy to understand. The officer of the next platoon comes along. He is equally ignorant of affairs, but he thinks the figures are French, attacking the Turks. They, too, wear blue. The first officer rushes down the line telling the men to 'cease fire.' The men growl and go back to their cooking. It is fairly certain that none of them hit any of the distant figures, but the officer is worried. Why was nobody told what was to happen ? What is it all about ? He has been put in a false position. Presently a belated chit arrives to say that the French were to attack at sunrise, but the attack was a fiasco and is postponed.

And now all the air is sickly with the smell of cooking, and the dry wood crackles in every

corner; little wisps of smoke go straight up in the still air. All the Peninsula is beautiful in the sunlight, and wonderful to look upon against the dark blue of the sea; the dew sparkles on the scrub; over the cypress grove comes the first aeroplane, humming contentedly. Another day has begun; the officer goes down whistling to wash in a bucket.

IV

SUCH was life in the line at that time. But I should make the soldier's almost automatic reservation, that it might have been worse. There might have been heavy shelling; but the shelling on the trenches was negligible—then; there might have been mud, but there was not. And eight such days might have left Harry Penrose quite unaffected in spirit, in spite of his physical handicaps, by reason of his extraordinary vitality and zest. But there were two incidents before we went down which did affect him, and it is necessary that they should be told.

On the fifth day in the line he did a very brave thing—brave, at least, in the popular sense, which means that many another man would not have done that thing. To my mind, a man is brave only in proportion to his knowledge and his susceptibility to fear; the standard of the mob, the standard of the official military mind, is absolute; there are no fine shades—no account of circumstance and temperament is allowed—and perhaps this is inevitable. Most men would say that Harry's deed was a brave one. I have said so myself—but I am not sure.

Eighty to a hundred yards from one section of our line was a small stretch of Turkish trench, considerably in advance of their main line. From this trench a particularly harassing fire was kept up, night and day, and the Brigade Staff considered that it should be captured. High officers in shirt sleeves and red hats looked long and wisely at it through periscopes; colonels and adjutants and subalterns and sergeants stood silent and respectful while the great men pondered. The great men then turned round with the air of those who make profound decisions, and announced that 'You ought to be able to "enfilade" it from "over there,"' or 'I suppose they "enfilade" you from there.' The term 'enfilade' invariably occurred somewhere in these dicta, and in the listeners' minds there stirred the suspicion that the Great Ones had not been looking at the right trench; if indeed they had focused the unfamiliar instrument so as to see anything at all. But the decision was made; and for the purposes of a night attack it was important to know whether the trench was held strongly at night, or occupied only by a few busy snipers. Harry was ordered to reconnoitre the trench with two scouts.

The night was pitch black, with an unusual absence of stars. The worst of the rapid fire was over, but there was a steady spit and

crackle of bullets from the Turks, and especially from the little trench opposite. Long afterwards, in France, he told me that he would never again dream of going out on patrol in the face of such a fire. But to-night it did not occur to him to delay his expedition. The profession of scouting made a special appeal to the romantic side of him; the prospect of some real, practical scouting was exciting. According to the books much scouting was done under heavy fire, but according to the books, and in the absence of any experience to the contrary, it was probable that the careful scout would not be killed. Then why waste time? (All this I gathered indirectly from his account of the affair.) Two bullets smacked into the parapet by his head as he climbed out of the dark sap and wriggled forward into the scrub; but even these did not give him pause. Only while he lay and waited for the two men to follow did he begin to realize how many bullets were flying about. The fire was now really heavy, and when I heard that Harry had gone out, I was afraid. But he as yet was only faintly surprised. The Colonel had sent him out; the Colonel had said the Turks fired high, and if you kept low you were quite safe—and he ought to know. This was a regular thing in warfare, and must be done. So on like reptiles into the darkness, dragging with hands

and pushing with knees. Progress in the orthodox scout fashion was surprisingly slow and exhausting. The scrub tickled and scratched your face, the revolver in your hands caught in the roots ; the barrel must be choked with dust. Moreover, it was impossible to see anything at all, and the object of a reconnaissance being to see something, this was perplexing. Even when the frequent flares went up and one lay pressed to the earth, one's horizon was the edge of a tuft of scrub five yards away. This always looked like the summit of some commanding height ; but labouring thither one saw by the next flare only another exactly similar horizon beyond. So must the beetle feel, wandering in the rugged spaces of a well-kept lawn. It was long before Harry properly understood this phenomenon ; and by then his neck was stiff and aching from lying flat and craning his head back to see in front. But after an hour of crawling the ground sloped down a little, and now they could see the sharp, stabbing flashes from the rifles of the snipers in the little trench ahead of them. Clearly they were only snipers, for the flashes came from only eight or nine particular spots, spaced out at intervals. *Now* the scouts glowed with the sense of achievement as they watched. They had found out. Never again could Harry have lain like that,

naked in the face of those near rifles, coldly calculating and watching, without an effort of real heroism. On this night he did it easily —confident, unafraid. Elated with his little success, something prompted him to go farther and confirm his deductions. He whispered to his men to lie down in a fold of the ground, and crept forward to the very trench itself, aiming at a point midway between two flashes. There was no wire in front of the trench, but as he saw the parapet looming like a mountain close ahead, he began to realize what a mad fool he was, alone and helpless within a few yards of the Turks, an easy mark in the light of the next flare. But he would not go back, and squirming on worked his head into a gap in the parapet, and gazed into a vast blackness. This he did with a wild incautiousness, the patience of the true scout overcome by his anxiety to do what he intended as soon as possible. The Turks' own rifles had drowned the noise of his movements, and providentially no flare went up till his body was against the parapet. When at length the faint wavering light began and swelled into sudden brilliance, he could see right into the trench, and when the shadows chased each other back into its depths as the light fell, he lay marvelling at his own audacity: so impressed was he by the wonder of his exploit that he was incapable

of making any intelligent observations, other than the bald fact that there were no men in that part of the trench. He was still waiting for another flare when there was a burst of rapid fire from our own line a little to the right. Suddenly he realized that B Company *did not know he was out*; C Company knew, but in his haste he had forgotten to see that the others were informed before he left, as he had arranged to do with the Colonel. He and his scouts would be shot by B Company. Obsessed with this thought he turned and scrambled breathlessly back to the two waiting men. God knows why he wasn't seen and sniped; and his retirement must have been very noisy, for as he reached the others all the snipers in the trench opened fire feverishly together. Harry and his men, who were cold with waiting, wriggled blindly back; they no longer pretended to any deliberation or cunning, but having come to no harm so far were not seriously anxious about themselves; only it seemed good to go back now. But after a few yards one of the men, Trower, gave a scream of agony and cried out, 'I 'm hit, I 'm hit.'

In that moment, Harry told me, all the elation and pride of his exploit ebbed out of him. A sick disgust with himself and everything came over him. Williams, the other scout, lay between him and Trower, who was

now moaning horribly in the darkness. For a moment Harry was paralysed; he lay there, saying feebly, 'Where are you hit? Where is he hit, Williams? Where are you hit?' When at last he got to his side, the man was almost unconscious with pain, but he had managed to screech out 'Both legs.' In fact, he had been shot through the femoral artery and one leg was broken. In that blackness skilled hands would have had difficulty in bandaging any wound; Harry and Williams could not even tell where the wound was, for all his legs were wet and sticky with blood. But both of them were fumbling and scratching at their field-dressings for some moments before they realized this. Then they started to take the man in, half dragging, half carrying him. At every movement the man shrieked in agony. When they stood up to carry him bodily, he screamed so piercingly that the storm of bullets was immediately doubled about them. When they lay down and dragged him he screamed less, but progress was impossibly slow. And now it seemed that there were Turks in the open scrub about them, for there were flashes and loud reports at strangely close quarters. The Turks could not see the miserable little party, but Trower's screams were an easy guide. Then Harry bethought him of the little medical case in his

breast-pocket where, with needles and aspirin and plaster and pills, was a small phial of morphine tablets. For Trower's sake and their own, his screaming must be stilled. Tearing open his pocket he fumbled at the elastic band round the case. The little phial was smaller than the rest; he knew where it lay. But the case was upside-down; all the phials seemed the same size. Trembling, he pulled out the cork and shook out one of the tablets into his hand; a bullet cracked like a whip over his head; the tablet fell in the scrub. He got another out and passed it over to Williams. Williams' hand was shaking, and he dropped it. Harry groaned. The next two were safely transferred and pressed into Trower's mouth: he did not know how strong they were, but he remembered vaguely seeing 'One or two' on the label, and at that black moment the phrase came curiously into his head, 'As ordered by the doctor.' Trower was quieter now, and this made the other two a little calmer. Harry told me he was now so cool that he could put the phial back carefully in the case and return them to his pocket; even, from sheer force of habit, he buttoned up the pocket. But when they moved off they realized with a new horror that they were lost. They had come out originally from the head of a long sap; in the darkness and the

excitement they had lost all sense of direction, and had missed the sap. Probably they were not more than fifty yards from friends, but they might be moving parallel to the sap or parallel to the front line, and that way they might go on indefinitely. They could not drag their wretched burden with them indefinitely; so Harry sent Williams to find the trench, and lay throbbing by the wounded man. No one who has not been lost in the pitchy dark in No Man's Land can understand how easy it is to arrive at that condition, and the intense feeling of helplessness it produces. That solitary wait of Harry's must have been terrible; for he had time now to ponder his position. Perhaps Williams would not find the trench; perhaps he, too, would be hit; perhaps he would not be able to find the scouts again. What should they do then? Anything was possible in this awful darkness, with these bullets cracking and tearing about him. Perhaps he would be killed himself. Straining his ears he fancied he could hear the rustle of creeping men, any moment he expected a rending blow on his own tender body. But his revolver had been dropped in the dragging of Trower. He could do nothing—only try to bind up the poor legs again. Poor Harry! as he lay there bandaging his scout, he noticed that the lad had stopped moaning, and said to himself that his morphine

tablets had done their work. That was something, anyhow. But the man was already dead. He could not have lived for ten minutes, the doctor told me. And when Williams at last returned, trailing a long string from the sap, it was a dead man they brought painfully into the trench and handed over gently to the stretcher-bearers.

I was in the sap when they came, and dragged Harry away from it. And when they told him he nearly cried.

II

The other incident is briefly told. On our last day in the line Harry's platoon were working stealthily in the hot sun at a new section of trench connecting two saps, and some one incautiously threw a little new-turned earth over the parapet. The Turks, who seldom molested any of the regular, established trenches with shell-fire, but hotly resented the making of new ones, opened fire with a light high-velocity gun of the whizz-bang type. This was our first experience of the weapon, and the first experience of a whizz-bang is very disturbing. The long shriek of the ordinary shell encourages the usually futile hope that by ducking one may avoid destruction. With the whizz-bang there is no hope,

for there is no warning; the sound and the shell arrive almost simultaneously. Harry's platoon did not like these things. The first three burst near but short of the trench, filling the air with fumes; the fourth hit and removed most of the parapet of one bay. Harry, hurrying along to the place, found the four men there considerably surprised, crouching in the corners and gazing stupidly at the yawning gap. It was undesirable, if not impossible, to rebuild the parapet during daylight, so he moved them into the next bay. He then went along the trench to see that all the men had ceased work. He heard two more shells burst behind him as he went. On his way back two men rushing round a corner—two men with white faces smeared with black and a little blood—almost knocked him down; they were speechless. He went through the bay which had been blown in; it was silent, empty; the bay beyond was silent too, save for the buzzing of a thousand flies. In it he had left eight men; six of them were lying dead. Two had marvellously escaped. The first whizz-bang had blown away the parapet; the second, following immediately after, had passed miraculously through the hole, straight into the trench—a piece of astounding bad luck or good gunnery. The men could not be buried till dusk, and we left them there.

Two hours later, as we sat under a waterproof sheet and talked quietly of this thing, there came an engineer officer wandering along the trench. He had come, crouching, through those two shattered and yawning bays: he was hot and very angry. 'Why the hell don't you bury those Turks?' he said, 'they must have been there for weeks!' This is the kind of charge which infuriates the soldier at any time; and we did not like the added suggestion that those six good men of the 14th Platoon were dead Turks. We told him they were Englishmen, dead two hours. 'But, my God, man,' he said, 'they're black!' We led him back, incredulous, to the place.

When we got there we understood. Whether from the explosion or the scorching sun in that airless place, I know not, but those six men were, as he said, black—black and reeking and hideous—and the flies . . . !

Harry and I crouched at the end of that bay, truly unable to believe our eyes. I hope I may never again see such horror as was in Harry's face. They were men of his platoon, and he knew them, as an officer should. After the explosion, there had been only four whom he could surely identify. Now there was not one.

In two hours. . . .

. . . . . .

I do not wish to labour this or any similar episode. I have seen many worse things; every soldier has. In a man's history they are important only in their effect upon him, and the effect they have is determined by many things—by his experience, and his health, and his state of mind. But if you are to understand what I may call the battle-psychology of a man, as I want you to understand Harry's, you must not ignore particular incidents. For in this respect the lives of soldiers are not uniform; though they may live in the same regiment and fight in the same battles, the experiences which matter come to them diversely—to some crowded and overwhelming, to others by kind and delicate degrees. And so do their spirits develop.

These two incidents following so closely upon each other had a most unhappy cumulative effect on Harry. His night's scouting, in spite of its miserable end, had not perceptibly dimmed his romantic notions; it had been an adventure, and from a military point of view a successful adventure. The Colonel had been pleased with the reconnaissance, as such. But the sight of his six poor men, lying black and beastly in that sunlit hole, had killed the 'Romance of War' for him. Henceforth it must be a necessary but disgusting business, to be endured, like a dung-hill. But this, in

the end, was inevitable; with all soldiers it is only a matter of time, though for a boy of Harry's temperament it was an ill chance that it should come so soon.

What was more serious was this: the two incidents had revived, in a most malignant form, his old distrust of his own competence. I found that he was brooding over this—accusing himself, quite wrongly, I think, of being responsible for the death of seven men. He had bungled the scouting; he had recklessly attracted attention to the party, and Trower, not he, had paid for it. He had moved four men into a bay where four others already were, and six of them had been killed. I tried hard to persuade him, not quite honestly, that he had done absolutely the right thing. In scouting, of all things, I told him, a man *must* take chances; and the matter of the two whizz-bangs was sheer bad luck. It was no good; he was a fool—a failure. Unconsciously, the Colonel encouraged this attitude. For, thinking that Harry's nerve might well have been shaken by his first experience, he would not let him go out on patrol again on our next 'tour' in the line. I think he was quite mistaken in this view, for the boy did not even seem to realize how narrow his own escapes had been, so concerned was he about his lost men. Nor did this explanation of the Colonel's

veto even occur to him. Rather it confirmed him in his distrust of himself, for it seemed to him that the Colonel, too, must look upon him as a bungler, a waster of men's lives.

All this was very bad, and I was much afraid of what the reaction might be. But there was one bright spot. So far he only distrusted his military capacity; there was no sign of his distrusting his own courage. I prayed that that might not follow.

V

MID-JUNE came with all its plagues and fevers and irritable distresses. Life in the rest-camp became daily more tormenting. There set in a steady wind from the north-east which blew all day down the flayed rest-areas of the Peninsula, raising great columns of blinding, maddening dust. It was a hot, parching wind, which in no way mitigated the scorch of the sun, and the dust it brought became a definite enemy to human peace. It pervaded everything. It poured into every hole and dug-out, and filtered into every man's belongings; it formed a gritty sediment in water and tea, it passed into a man with every morsel of food he ate and scraped and tore at his inside. It covered his pipe so that he could not even smoke with pleasure; it lay in a thick coating on his face so that he looked like a wan ghost, paler than disease had made him. It made the cleaning of his rifle a too, too frequent farce; it worked under his breeches, and gathered at the back of his knees, chafing and torturing him; and if he lay down to sleep in his hole it swept in billows over his face, or men passing clumsily above kicked great showers upon him. Sleep was not possible

in the rest-camps while that wind blew. But indeed there were many things which made rest in the rest-camps impossible. Few more terrible plagues can have afflicted British troops than the flies of Gallipoli. In May, by comparison, there were none. In June they came by armies ; in July by multitudes. Most Englishmen have lain down some gentle summer day to doze on a shaded lawn and found that one or two persistent flies have destroyed the repose of the afternoon ; many women have turned sick at the sight of a blowfly in their butcher's shop. Let them imagine a semi-tropical sun in a place where there is little or no shade, where sanitary arrangements are less than primitive, where, in spite of all precautions, there are scraps of bacon and sugar and tea-leaves lying everywhere in the dust, and every man has his little daily store of food somewhere near him, where there are dead bodies and the carcases of mules easily accessible to the least venturesome fly—let them read for 'one' fly a hundred, a thousand, a million, and even then they will not exaggerate the horror of that plague.

Under it the disadvantages of a sensitive nature and a delicate upbringing were easy to see. An officer lies down in the afternoon to sleep in his hole. The flies cluster on his face. Patiently, at first, he brushes them

away, with a drill-like mechanical movement of his hand; by-and-by he does it angrily; his temper is going. He covers his face with a handkerchief; it is distressingly hot, but at least he may have some rest. The flies settle on his hand, on his neck, on the bare part of his leg. Even there the feel of them is becoming a genuine torment. They creep under the handkerchief; there is one on his lip, another buzzing about his eye. Madly he tears off the handkerchief and lashes out, waving it furiously till the air is free. The flies gather on the walls of the dug-out, on the waterproof sheet, and watch; they are waiting motionless till he lies down again. He throws his coat over his bare knees and lies back. The torment begins again. It is unendurable. He gets up, cursing, and goes out; better to walk in the hot sun or sit under the olive-tree in the windy dust.

But look into the crowded ditches of the men. Some of them are fighting the same fight, hands moving and faces twitching, like the flesh of horses, automatically. But most of them lie still, not asleep, but in a kind of dogged artificial insensibility. The flies crowd on their faces; they swarm about their eyes, and crawl unmolested about their open mouths. It is a horrible sight, but those men are lucky.

Then there was always a great noise in the camp, for men would be called for from Headquarters at the end of it or orders passed down, and so great was the wind and the noise of the French guns and the Turkish shells, that these messages had to be bawled from man to man. The men grew lazy from sheer weariness of these messages, so that they were mutilated as they came and had to be repeated; and there was this babel always. The men, too, like the officers, became irritable with each other, and wrangled incessantly over little things; only the officers argued quietly and bitterly, and the men shouted oaths at each other and filthy epithets. There was only a yard between the holes of the officers and the holes of the men, and their raucous quarrelling grated on nerves already sensitive from the trials of the day, and the officer came near to cursing his own men; and that is bad.

So there was no rest to be had in the camp during the day; and at night we marched out in long columns to dig in the whispering gullies, or unload ships on the beach. There were many of these parties, and we were much overworked, as all infantry units invariably are; and only at long intervals there came an evening when a man might lie down under the perfect stars and sleep all night undisturbed. Then indeed he had rest; and when he woke to a sudden burst

of shell-fire, lay quiet in his hole, too tired and dreamy to be afraid.

Dust and flies and the food and the water and our weakness joined forces against us, and dysentery raged. There were many who had never heard of the disease, and thought vaguely of the distemper of dogs. Those who had heard of it thought of it as something rather romantically Eastern, like the tsetse fly, and the first cases were invested with a certain mysterious distinction—especially as most of them were sent away. But it became universal; everybody had it, and everybody could not be sent away. One man in a thousand went through that time untouched; one in ten escaped with a slight attack. But the remainder lived permanently or intermittently in a condition which in any normal campaign would have long since sent them on stretchers to the base. The men could not be spared; they stayed and endured and tottered at their work. Thus there was every circumstance to encourage infection and little to resist it. One by one the officers of D Company were stricken. The first stages were mildly unpleasant, encouraging that comfortable sense of martyrdom which belongs to a recognized but endurable complaint. As it grew worse, men became querulous but were still interested in themselves, and those not in the final stages discussed their symptoms,

emulously, disgustingly—still a little anxious to be worse than their fellows.

In the worst stage there was no emulation, only a dull misery of recurrent pain and lassitude and disgust. A man could not touch the coarse food which was all we had; or, if from sheer emptiness he did, his sufferings were immediately magnified. Yet always he had a wild craving for delicate food, and as he turned from the sickening bacon in the gritty lid of his mess-tin, conjured bright visions of lovely dainties which might satisfy his longing and give him back his strength. So men prayed for parcels. But when they came, or when some wanderer came back from the Islands with a basket of Grecian eggs, too often it was too late for the sickest men, and their agonies were only increased. Scientific dieting was impossible. They could only struggle on, for ever sick, yet for ever on duty; this was the awful thing. When a man reached this stage, the army was lucky indeed if it did not lose him; he was lucky himself if he did not die. But so strong is the human spirit and so patient the human body, that most won through this phase to a spasmodic existence of alternate sickness and precarious health; and when they said to themselves 'I am well,' and ate heartily, and said to their companions 'This and that is what you should do,' the disease gripped them again,

each time more violently. All this sapped the strength of a man; and finally there came a terrible debility, a kind of paralysing lassitude, when it needed a genuine flogging of the will for him to lift himself and walk across the camp, and his knees seemed permanently feeble, as if a fever had just left him. Yet many endured this condition for weeks and months till the fever definitely took them. Some became so weak that while they still tottered up to the line and about their duties, they could not gratuitously drag themselves to the beach to bathe. Then indeed were they far gone, for the evening swims were the few paradisial moments of that time. When the sun had but an hour to live, and the wind and the dust and the flies were already dwindling, we climbed down a cliff-path where the Indians kept their sacred but odorous goats. There was a fringe of rocks under the cliffs where we could dive. There we undressed, hot and grimy, lousy, thirsty, and tired. Along the rocks solitary Indians were kneeling towards Mecca. Some of the old battered boats of the first landing were still nosing the shore, and at a safe distance was a dead mule. The troops did not come here but waded noisily in the shallow water; so all was quiet, save for an occasional lazy shell from Asia and the chunk-chunk of a patrol-boat. The sea at this hour put on its most perfect blue,

and the foot-hills across the Straits were all warm and twinkling in the late sun. So we sat and drank in the strengthening breeze, and felt the clean air on our contaminated flesh; and plunging luxuriously into the lovely water forgot for a magical moment all our weariness and disgust.

When a man could not do this, he was ill indeed.

II

By this time we had found each other out. We had discovered a true standard of right and wrong; we knew quite clearly now, some of us for the first time, what sort of action was 'dirty,' and we were fairly clear how likely each of us was to do such an action. We knew all our little weaknesses and most of our serious flaws; under that olive-tree they could not long be hid. In the pleasant life of London or Oxford we had had no occasion to do anything dishonourable or underhand; in our relations with other men we had not even wished to be guilty of anything worse than mild unkindnesses or consistent unpunctuality. But behind the footlights of Gallipoli we had found real burning temptations; and we had found our characters. D Company on the whole was lucky, and had stood the test well. We knew that Burnett was 'bogus'; but we knew that Williams of

A Company was incalculably more 'bogus'; we had stood in the dark sap at night and reluctantly overheard the men of his company speak of him.

But little weaknesses beget great irritations in that life, and the intimate problems of communal feeding were enough to search out all our weaknesses. We knew that some of us, though courageous, were greedy; that others, though not greedy, were querulous about their food and had a nasty habit of 'sticking out for their rights': indeed, I think I developed this habit myself. We had had trouble about parcels. Parcels in theory were thrown into the common stock of the mess: but Egerton and Burnett never had parcels, and were by no means the most delicate eaters of other people's dainties. Harry and Hewett reserved some portion of each parcel, a cake or a slab of chocolate, which they ate furtively in their dug-outs, or shared with each other in the dusk; Burnett ostentatiously endowed the mess with his entire stock, but afterwards at every meal hinted sombrely at the rapacity of those who had devoured it. Harry and Hewett each made contributions to the mess; but Harry objected to the excessive consumption of this food by Burnett, and Hewett, who gave ungrudgingly to the rest of us, had a similar reservation—never expressed—as against Egerton. So all this matter of

food set in motion a number of antagonisms seldom or never articulate, but painfully perceptible at every meal.

The parcel question, I think, was one of the things which embittered the quarrel between Harry and Burnett. A parcel from home, to schoolboys and soldiers and prisoners and sailors and all homesick exiles, is the most powerful emblem of sentiment and affection. A man would willingly preserve its treasures for himself to gloat over alone, in no mere fleshly indulgence, but as a concrete expression of affection from the home for which he longs. This is not nonsense. He likes to undo the strings in the grubby hole which is his present home, and secretly become sentimental over the little fond packages and queer, loving thoughts which have composed it. And though in a generous impulse he may say to his companions, 'Come and eat this cake,' and see it in a moment disappear, it is hard for him not to think, 'My sister (or wife, or mother) made this *for me*; they thought it would give *me* pleasure for many days. Already it is gone—would they not be hurt if they knew?' He feels that he has betrayed the tenderness of his home; and though the giving of pleasure to companions he likes may overcome this feeling, the compulsory squandering of such precious pleasure on a man he despises calls

up the worst bitterness of his heart. So was it between Harry and Burnett.

If, by the way, it be suggested that Burnett was entitled to feel the same sentimental jealousy about *his* parcels, I answer that Burnett's parcels came on his own order from the impersonal hand of Fortnum and Mason.

All of us were very touchy, very raw and fretful in that fevered atmosphere. Men who were always late in relieving another on watch, or unreasonably resented a minute's postponement of their relief, or never had any article of their own but for ever borrowed mess-tins and electric torches and note-books from more methodical people, or were overbearing to batmen, or shifted jobs on to other officers, or slunk off to bathe alone when they should have taken their sultry platoon—such men made enemies quickly. Between Eustace and Hewett, who had been good friends before and were to be good friends again, there grew up a slow animosity. Hewett was one of the methodical class of officer, Eustace was one of the persistent borrowers. Moreover, as I have said, he was a cynic, and he *would* argue. He had a contentious remark for every moment of the day; and though this tormented us all beyond bearing, Hewett was the only one with both the energy and the intellectual equipment to accept his challenges. So these two argued quietly

and fiercely in the hot noon or the blue dusk, till the rest of us were weary of them both, and the sound of Eustace's harsh tones was an agony to the nerves. They were both too consciously refined to lose their tempers healthily, and when they reached danger-point, Hewett would slink away like an injured animal to his burrow. In this conflict Harry took no speaking part, for while in spirit and affection he was on Hewett's side, he paid intellectual tribute to Eustace's conduct of the argument, and listened as a rule in puzzled silence. Eustace again was his cordial ally against Burnett while Hewett had merely the indifference of contempt for that officer.

So it was all a strange tangle of friendship and animosity and good-nature and bitterness. Yet on the surface, you understand, we lived on terms of toleration and vague geniality; except for the disputations of Hewett and Eustace there was little open disagreement. In the confined space of a company mess permanent hostilities would make life impossible; it is only generals who are allowed to find that they can no longer 'act with' each other, and resign: platoon commanders may come to the same conclusion, but they have to go on acting. And so openly we laughed and endured and bore with each other. Only there was always this undertone of irritations and animosities

which, in the maddening conditions of our life, could never be altogether silenced, and might at any moment rise to a strangled scream.

Harry's appointment as Scout Officer was the first thing to set Burnett against Harry, though already many things had set Harry against Burnett. It had been commonly assumed, in view of Burnett's 'backwoods' reputation, that he would succeed Martin as Scout Officer. The Colonel's selection of Harry took us a little by surprise, though it only showed that the Colonel was a keener judge of character and ability than the rest of us. No one, I think, was more genuinely pleased that Burnett was not to be Scout Officer than Burnett himself; but in the interests of his 'dare-devil' pretensions he had to affect an air of disappointment, and let it be known by grunts and shrugs and sour looks that he considered the choice of Harry to be an injury to himself and the battalion. As far as Harry was concerned this resentment of Burnett's was more or less genuine, for his reluctance to take on the job did not prevent him being jealous of the man who did.

Then Burnett was one of the people who had nothing of his own, and seemed to regard Harry, as the youngest of us all, as the proper person to provide him with all the necessaries of life. In those days we had no plates or

crockery, but ate and drank out of our scratched and greasy mess-tins. Harry's mess-tin disappeared, and for three days he was compelled to borrow from Hewett or myself—a tedious and, to him, hateful business. One day Burnett had finished his meal a long way ahead of any of us, and Harry, in the desperation of hungry waiting, asked him for the loan of his mess-tin. Automatically he looked at the bottom of the tin, and there found his initials inscribed. It was his own tin. Further, some one had tried to scratch the initials out. Harry kept his temper with obvious difficulty. Burnett knew well that Harry had lost his mess-tin (we were all sick of hearing it), but he said he was quite ignorant of having it in his possession. When Harry argued with him, Burnett sent for his batman and cursed him for taking another officer's property. The wretched man mumbled that he had 'found' it, and withdrew; and we all sat in a silence teeming with distrustful thoughts. We were sorry for the batman; we were sorry for Harry. Burnett may not have taken the mess-tin with his own hands, but morally he stood convicted of an action which was 'dirty.'

Then Burnett and Harry took a working-party together to dig in the gully. Burnett was the senior officer, but left Harry to work all night in the whispering rain of stray bullets,

while he sat in an Engineers' dug-out and drank whisky. Harry did not object to this, the absence of Burnett being always congenial to him. But next day there came a complimentary message from the Brigadier about the work of that working-party. Burnett was sent for and warmly praised by the Colonel. Burnett stood smugly and said nothing. Harry, when he heard of it, was furious, and wanted, he said, to ' have a row ' with him. What he expected Burnett to say, I don't know ; the man could hardly stand before his Colonel and say, ' Sir, Penrose did all the work, I was in the Engineers' dug-out nearly all the time with my friends, and had one or two drinks.' A row, in any case, would be intolerable in that cramped, intimate existence, and I dissuaded Harry, though I made Egerton have a few words with Burnett on the subject. Harry contented himself with ironic comments on Burnett's ' gallantry ' and ' industry ', asking him blandly at meals if he expected to get his promotion over that working-party, and suggesting to Egerton that Burnett should take Harry's next turn of duty ' because he is so good at it.' This made Burnett beautifully angry. But it was bitter badinage, and did not improve the atmosphere.

There were a number of such incidents between the two ; they were very petty in

themselves, some of them, like flies, but in their cumulative effect very large and distressing. In many cases there was no verbal engagement, or only an angry, inarticulate mutter. Public, unfettered angers were necessarily avoided. But this pent-up, suppressed condition of the quarrel made it more malignant, like a disease. And it got on Harry's nerves; indeed, it got on mine. It became an active element in that complex irritation which was eating into his young system; it was leagued with the flies, and the dust, and the smells, and the bad food, and the wind, and the harassing shells of the Turks, and the disgustful torment of disease.

III

For Harry was a very sick man. He had endured through all the stages of dysentery and now lived with that awful legacy of weakness of which I have spoken. And the disease had not wholly left him, for some days he lay faint with excruciating spasms of pain. Slightly built and constitutionally fragile at the beginning, he was now a mere wasted wisp of a man. The flesh seemed to have melted from his face, and when he stood naked on the beach it seemed that the moving of his bone must soon tear holes in the unsubstantial skin. Standing in the trench with the two points of

his collar-bone jutting out like promontories above his shirt, and a pale film of dust over his face, he looked like the wan ghost of some forgotten soldier. On the Western Front, where one case of dysentery created a panic among the authorities, and in the most urgent days they have never had to rely on skeletons to fight, he would long since have been bundled off. But in this orgy of disease no officer could be sent away who was willing to stay and could still totter up the gully. And Harry would not go. When he went to the battalion doctor it was with an airy request for the impotent palliatives then provided for early dysentery, and with no suggestion of the soul-destroying sickness that was upon him. One day he would not come down to the rocks and bathe, so feeble he was. 'I know now,' he said, 'the meaning of that bit in the Psalms, "My knees are like water and all my bones are out of joint."' 'Harry,' I said, 'you 're not fit to stay here—why not go sick?' At which he smiled weakly, and said that he might be better in a day or two. Pathetic hope! all men had it. And so Hewett and I walked down, a little sadly, alone, marvelling at the boy's courage. For it seemed to us that he wanted to stay and see it through, and if indeed he might recover we could not afford to lose him. So we said no more.

But by degrees I gained a different impression. Harry still opened his mind to Hewett and myself more than to any one else, but it was by no direct speech, rather by the things he did not say, the sentences half finished, the look in his eyes, that the knowledge came—that Harry did want to go away. The romantic impulse had perished long since in that ruined trench; but now even the more mundane zest of doing his duty had lost its savour in the long ordeal of sickness and physical distress. He did want to go sick. He had only to speak a word; and still he would not go. When I knew this, I marvelled at his courage yet more.

For many days I watched him fighting this lonely conflict with himself, a conflict more terrible and exacting than any battle. Sometimes the doctor came and sat under our olive-tree, and some of us spoke jestingly of the universal sickness, and asked him how ill we must be before he would send us home. Harry alone sat silent; it was no joke to him. 'And how do *you* feel now, Penrose?' said the doctor. 'Are you getting your arrowroot all right?' Harry opened his mouth—but for a moment said nothing. I think it had been in his mind to say what he did feel, but he only murmured, 'All right, thank you, doctor.' The doctor looked at him queerly. He knew well

enough, but it was his task to keep men on the Peninsula, not to send them away.

Once I spent an afternoon in one of the hospital ships in the bay. When I came back and told them of the cool wards and pleasant nurses, and all the peace and cleanliness and comfort that was there, I caught Harry's wistful gaze upon me, and I stopped. It was well enough for the rest of us in comparative health to imagine luxuriously those unattainable amenities. None of us were ill enough then to go sick if we wished it. Harry was. And I knew that such talk must be an intolerable temptation.

Then one day, on his way up to the line with a working-party, he nearly fainted. 'I felt it coming on,' he told me, 'in a block. I thought to myself, "This is the end of it all for me, anyhow." I actually did go off for a moment, I think, and then some one pushed me from behind—and as we moved on it wore off again. I did swear——' Harry stopped, realizing the confession he had made. I tried to feel for myself the awful bitterness of that awakening in the stifling trench, shuffling uphill with the flies. . . . But he had told me now everything I had only guessed before, and once more I urged him to go sick and have done with it.

'I would,' he said, 'only I 'm not sure . . .

I know I 'm jolly ill, and not fit for a thing . . . but I 'm not sure if it 's only that. . . . I was pretty brave when I got here, I think ' (I nodded), ' and I think I am still . . . but last time we were in the line I found I didn't like looking over the top nearly so much . . . so I want to be sure that I 'm quite all right . . . in that way . . . before I go sick. . . . Besides, you know what everybody says. . . .'

' Nobody could say anything about you,' I told him ; ' one 's only got to look at you to see that you 've got one foot in the grave.' ' Well, we go up again to-morrow,' he said, ' and if I 'm not better after that, I 'll think about it again.'

I had to be content with that, though I was not content. For my fears were fulfilled, since in the grip of this sickness he had begun at last to be doubtful of his own courage.

But that night Burnett went to the doctor and said that he was too ill to go on. So far as the rest of us knew, he had never had anything but the inevitable preliminary attack of dysentery, though it is only fair to say that most of us were so wrapped up in the exquisite contemplation of our own sufferings, that we had little time to study the condition of others. The doctor, however, had no doubts about Burnett ; he sent him back to us with a flea in his ear and a dose of chlorodyne. The

story leaked out quickly, and there was much comment adverse to Burnett. When Harry heard it, he led me away to his dug-out. It was an evening of heavy calm, like the inside of a cathedral. Only a few mules circling dustily at exercise in the velvet gloom, and the distant glimmer of the Scotsmen's fires, made any stir of movement. The men had gone early to their blankets, and now sang softly their most sentimental songs, reserved always for the night before another journey to the line. They sang them in a low croon of ecstatic melancholy, marvellously in tune with the purple hush of the evening. For all its aching regret it was a sound full of hope and gentle resolution. Harry whispered to me, 'You heard about Burnett? Thank God, nobody can say those things about me! I'm not going off this Peninsula till I'm pushed off.'

I said nothing. It was a heroic sentiment, and this was the heroic hour. It is what men say in the morning that matters.

In the morning we moved off as the sun came up. There had been heavy firing nearly all night, and over Achi Baba in the cloudless sky there hung a portent. It was as though some giant had been blowing smoke-rings, and with inhuman dexterity had twined and laced these rings together, without any of them losing their perfection of form. . . . As the sun came up

these cloud-rings stood out a rosy pink against the blue distance, and while we marched through, the sleeping camps turned gently through dull gold to pale pearl. I have never known what made this marvel, a few clouds forgotten by the wind, or the smoke of the night's battle; but I marched with my eyes upon it all the stumbling way to Achi Baba. And when I found Harry at a halt, he, too, was gazing at the wonder with all his men. 'It 's an omen', he said.

'Good or bad?'

'Good,' he said.

I have never understood omens; I suppose they are good or bad according to the mind of the man who sees them: and I was glad that Harry thought it was good.

VI

IT was one of the Great Dates: one of those red dates which build up the calendar of a soldier's past, and dwell in his memory when the date of his own birth is almost forgotten. It is strange what definite sign-posts these dates of a man's battle-days become in his calculation of time—like the foundation of Rome. An old soldier will sigh and say, 'Yes I know that was when Jim died—it was ten days after the Fourth of June,' or, 'I was promoted the day before the Twelfth of July.'

The years pile up, and zero after zero day is added for ever to his primitive calendar, and not one of them is thrust from his reverent memory; but at each anniversary he wakes and says, 'This is the 3rd of February, or the 1st of July,' and thinks of old companions who went down on that day; and though he has seen glorious successes since, he will ever think with a special tenderness of the black early failures when he first saw battle and his friends going under. And if in any place where soldiers gather and tell old tales there are two men who can say to each other, 'I, too, was at Helles on such a date,' there is a great bond between them.

On one of these days we sat under the olive-tree and waited. Up the hill one of that long series of heroic, costly, semi-successes was going through. We were in reserve. We had done six turns in the trenches without doing an attack. When we came out we were very ready to attack, very sure of ourselves. Now we were not so sure of ourselves; we were waiting, and there was a terrible noise. Very early the guns had begun, and everywhere, from the Straits to the sea, were the sharp barkings of the French 'seventy-fives,' thinly assisted by the British artillery, which was scanty and had almost no ammunition. But the big ships came out from Imbros and stood off and swelled the tumult, dropping their huge shells on the very peak of the little sugar-loaf that tops Achi Baba, and covering his western slopes with monstrous eruptions of black and yellow.

Down in the thirsty wilderness of the rest-camps the few troops in reserve lay restless under occasional olive-trees, or huddled under the exiguous shelter of ground-sheets stretched over their scratchings in the earth. They looked up and saw the whole of the great hill swathed in smoke and dust and filthy fumes, and heard the ruthless crackle of the Turks' rifles, incredibly rapid and sustained; and they thought of their friends scrambling over

in the bright sun, trying to get to those rifles. They themselves were thin and wasted with disease, and this uncertainty of waiting in readiness for they knew not what plucked at their nerves. They could not rest or sleep, for the flies crawled over their mouths and eyes and tormented them ceaselessly, and great storms of dust swept upon them as they lay. They were parched with thirst, but they must not drink, for their water-bottles were filled with the day's allowance, and none knew when they would be filled again. If a man took out of his haversack a chunk of bread, it was immediately black with flies, and he could not eat. Sometimes a shell came over the Straits from Asia with a quick, shrill shriek, and burst at the top of the cliffs near the staff officers who stood there and gazed up the hill with glasses. All morning the noise increased, and the shells streamed up the hill with a sound like a hundred expresses vanishing into a hundred tunnels: and there was no news. But soon the wounded began to trickle down, and there were rumours of a great success with terrible losses. In the afternoon the news became uncertain and disturbing. Most of the morning's fruits had been lost. And by evening they knew that indeed it had been a terrible day.

Under our olive-tree we were very fidgety. There had been no mail for many days, and we

had only month-old copies of the *Mail* and the *Weekly Times*, which we pretended listlessly to read. Eustace had an ancient *Nation*, and Hewett a shilling edition of *Vanity Fair*. Harry in the morning kept climbing excitedly up the trees to gaze at the obscure haze of smoke on the hill, and trying vainly to divine what was going on; but after a little he too sat silent and brooding. We were no longer irritable with each other, but studiously considerate, as if each felt that to-morrow he might want to take back a spiteful word and the other be dead. All our valises and our sparse mess furniture had long been packed away, for we had now been standing by for twenty-four hours, and we lay uneasily on the hard ground shifting continually from posture to posture to escape the unfriendly protuberances of the soil. In the tree the crickets chirped on always, in strange indifference to the storm of noise about them. They were hateful, those crickets.

Now and then Egerton was summoned to Headquarters; and when he came back each man said to himself, 'He has got our orders.' And some would not look at him, but talked suddenly of something else. And some said to him with a painful cheeriness, 'Any orders?' and when he shook his head, cursed a little but in their hearts wondered if they were glad. For the waiting was bad indeed, but who knew

what tasks they would have when the orders came! . . . Often the Reserves had the worst of it in these affairs . . . a forlorn hope of an attack without artillery . . . digging a new line under fire . . . beating off the counter-attack. . . .

But the waiting became intolerable, and all were glad, an hour before sunset, when we filed off slowly by half-platoons. Every gun was busy again, and all along the path to the hill, batteries of 'seventy-fives' barked suddenly from unsuspected holes, so close that a man's heart seemed to halt at the shock. The gully was full of confusion and wounded, and tired officers and odd groups of men bandying rumours and arguing in the sun. Halfway up the tale came mysteriously down the line that we were to attack a trench by ourselves; a whole brigade had tried and failed—there was a redoubt—there were endless machine-guns. . . . Some laughed—'a rumour'; but most men felt in their hearts that there was something in it, and inwardly 'pulled themselves together.' At last they were to be in a real battle, and walk naked in the open through the rapid fire. And as they moved on, there came over them an overpowering sense of the irrevocable. They thought of that summer day in 1914 when they walked light-hearted into the recruiting office. It had seemed a small thing then, but that was

what had done it, had brought them into this blazing gully, with the frogs croaking, and the men moaning in corners with their legs messed up. . . . If they had known about this gully then and these flies, and this battle they were going to, then, perhaps, they would have done something else in that August . . . gone into a dockyard . . . joined the A.S.C. like Jim Roberts. . . . Well, they hadn't, and they were not really sorry . . . only let there be no more waiting . . . and let it be quick and merciful, no stomach wounds and nastiness . . . no lying out in the scrub for a day with the sun, and the flies, and no water.

Look at that officer on the stretcher . . . *he* won't last long . . . remember his face . . . his platoon relieved us somewhere . . . where was it? . . . Hope I don't get one like him . . . nasty mess . . . would like one in the shoulder if it's got to be . . . hospital ship . . . get home, perhaps . . . no, they send you to Egypt . . . officer said so. . . . Hallo, halting here . . . Merton trench . . . old Reserve Line. . . . Getting dark . . . night-attack? . . . not wait till dawn, I hope . . . can't stand much more waiting. . . . Pass the word, Company Commanders to see the Colonel . . . that's done it, there goes Egerton . . . good man, thinks a lot of me . . . try not to let him down. . . .

But what Egerton and the others heard from the Colonel made a vain thing of all this bracing of men's spirits. There was a muddle; the attack was cancelled . . . no one knew where the Turks were, where anybody was . . . we were to stay the night in this old reserve trench and relieve the front line in the morning. . . .

When Egerton told his officers only Burnett spoke: he said 'Damn. *As* usual. I wanted a go at the old Turk': and we knew that it was not true. The rest of us said nothing, for we were wondering if it were true of ourselves. I went with Harry to his platoon; they too said nothing, and their faces were expressionless. But they were cold now, and hungry, and suddenly very tired; and they had no real fire of battle in them; they had waited too long for this crowning experience of an attack, braced themselves for it too often to be disappointed; and I knew that they were glad. But they did not mind being glad; they pondered no doubts about themselves, only curled up like animals in corners to sleep.

Harry, too, no doubt, had braced himself like the rest of us, and he, too, must have been glad, glad to lie down and look forward after all to seeing another sunrise. But I thought of his doubts about himself, and I felt that this business was far from easing his burden. For

me and for the men it was a simple thing—the postponement of a battle with the Turks; for Harry it was the postponement of a personal test: the battle inside him still went on; only it went on more bitterly.

II

There was a great muddle in front. Troops of two different brigades were hopelessly entangled in the shallow trenches they had taken from the Turks. They had few officers left, and their staffs had the most imperfect impressions of the whereabouts of their mangled commands. So the sun was well up when we finally took over the line; this was in defiance of all tradition, but the Turk was shaken and did not molest us. The men who passed us on their way down grimly wished us joy of what they had left; their faces were pale and drawn, full of loathing and weariness, but they said little; and the impression grew that there was something up there which they could not even begin to describe. It was a still, scorching morning, and as we moved on the air became heavy with a sickening stench, the most awful of all smells that man can be called to endure, because it preyed on the imagination as well as the senses. For we knew now what it was. We came into a Turkish trench, broad

and shallow. In the first bay lay two bodies—a Lowlander and a Turk. They lay where they had killed each other, and they were very foul and loathsome in the sun. A man looked up at them and passed on, thinking, 'Glad I haven't got to stay here.' In the next bay there were three dead, all Englishmen; and in the next there were more—and he thought, 'It was a hot fight just here.' But as he moved on, and in each succeeding bay beheld the same corrupt aftermath of yesterday's battle, the suspicion came to him that this was no local horror. Over the whole front of the attack, along two lines of trenches, these regiments of dead were everywhere found, strung in unnatural heaps along the parapets, or sprawling horribly half into the trench so that he touched them as he passed. Yet still he could not believe, and at each corner thought, 'Surely there will be none in this bay.'

But always there were more; until, if he were not careful or very callous, it began to get on his nerves, so that at the traverses he almost prayed that there might be no more beyond. Yet many did not realize what was before them till they were finally posted in the bays they were to garrison—three or four in a bay. Then they looked up at the sprawling horrors on the parapet and behind them, just above their heads, and knew that these were to be their

close companions all that sweltering day, and perhaps beyond. The regiment we had relieved had been too exhausted by the attack, or too short-handed, to bury more than a few, and the Turkish snipers made it impossible to do anything during the day. And so we sat all the scorching hours of the sun, or moved listlessly up and down, trying not to look upwards. . . . But there was a hideous fascination about the things, so that after a few hours a man came to know the bodies in his bay with a sickening intimacy, and could have told you many details about each of them—their regiment, and how they lay, and how they had died, and little things about their uniforms, a missing button, or some papers, or an old photograph sticking out of a pocket. . . . All of them were alive with flies, and at noon when we took out our bread and began to eat, these flies rose in a great black swarm and fell upon the food in our hands. After that no one could eat. All day men were being sent away by the doctor, stricken with sheer nausea by the flies and the stench and the things they saw, and went retching down the trench. To keep away the awful reek we went about for a little in the old gas-helmets, but the heat and burden of them in the hot, airless trench was intolerable. The officers had no dug-outs, but sat under the parapets like the men. No officer went sick; no officer could

be spared; and indeed we seemed to have a greater power of resistance to this ordeal of disgust than the men. But I don't know how Harry survived it. Being already in a very bad way physically, it affected him more than the rest of us, and it was the first day I had seen his cheerfulness defeated. At the worst he had always been ready to laugh a little at our misfortunes, the great safety-valve of a soldier, and make ironical remarks about Burnett or the Staff. This day he had no laugh left in him, and I thought sadly of that first evening when he jumped over the parapet to look at a dead Turk. He had seen enough now.

In the evening the Turk was still a little chastened, and all night we laboured at the burying of the bodies. It was bad work, but so strong was the horror upon us that every man who could be spared took his part, careless of sleep or rest, so long as he should not sit for another day with those things. But we could only bury half of them that night and all the next day we went again through that lingering torment. And in the afternoon when we had orders to go up to the front line after dusk for an attack we were glad. It was one of the very few moments in my experience when the war-correspondent's legend of a regiment's pleasure at the prospect of battle came true. For anything was welcome if only we could get

out of that trench, away from the smell and the flies, away from those bodies.

III

I am not going to tell you all about that attack, only so much of it as affects this history, which is the history of a man and not of the war. It was a one-battalion affair, and eventually a failure. D Company was in reserve, and our only immediate task was to provide a small digging-party, forty men under an officer, to dig some sort of communication ditch to the new line when taken. Burnett was told off for this job; we took these things more or less in turn, and it was his turn. And Burnett did not like it. We sat round a single candle under a waterproof sheet in a sort of open recess at the back of the front line, while Egerton gave him his orders. And there ran in my head the old bit about 'they all began with one accord to make excuse.' Burnett made no actual excuse; he could not. But he asked aggressive questions about the arrangements which plainly said that he considered this task too dangerous and too difficult for Burnett. He wanted more men, he wanted another officer—but no more could be spared from an already small reserve. He was full of 'the high ground on the right' from which his party would 'obviously' be

enfiladed and shot down to a man. However, he went. And we sat listening to the rapid fire or the dull thud of bombs, until in front a strange quiet fell, but to right and left were the sounds of many machine-guns. As usual, no one knew what had happened, but we expected a summons at any moment. We were all restless and jumpy, particularly Harry. For a man who has doubts of himself or too much imagination, to be in reserve is the worst thing possible. Harry was talkative again, and held forth about the absurdity of the whole attack, as to which he was perfectly right. But I felt that all the time he was thinking, 'Shall I do the right thing? Shall I do the right thing? Shall I make a mess of it?'

I went out and looked over the parapet, but could make nothing out. Then I saw two figures loom through the dark and scramble into the trench. And after them came others all along the line, coming in anyhow, in disorder. Then Burnett came along the trench, and crawled in under the waterproof sheet. I followed. 'It's no good,' he was saying, 'the men won't stick it. It's just what I told you . . . enfiladed from that high ground over there—two machine-guns. . . .'

'How many casualties have you had?' said Egerton.

'One killed, and two wounded.'

There was silence, but it was charged with eloquent thoughts. It was clear what had happened. The machine-guns were firing blindly from the right, probably over the heads of the party. The small casualties showed that. Casualties are the test. No doubt the men had not liked the stream of bullets overhead; at any moment the gun might lower. But there was nothing to prevent the digging being done, given an officer who would assert himself and keep the men together. That was what an officer was for. And Burnett had failed. He had let the company down.

Egerton, I knew, was considering what to do. The job had to be done. But should he send Burnett again, with orders not to return until he had finished, as he deserved, or should he send a more reliable officer and make sure?

Then Harry burst in: 'Let me take my platoon,' he said, 'they'll stick it all right.' And his tone was full of contempt for Burnett, full of determination. No doubts about him now.

Well, we sent him out with his platoon. And all night they dug and sweated in the dark. The machine-gun did lower at times, and there were many casualties, but Harry moved up and down in the open, cheerful and encouraging, getting away the wounded, and there were no

signs of the men not sticking it. I went out and stayed with him for an hour or so, and thought him wonderful. Curious from what strange springs inspiration comes. For Harry, for the second time, had been genuinely inspired by the evil example of his enemy. Probably, in the first place, he had welcomed the chance of doing something at last, of putting his doubts to the test, but I am sure that what chiefly carried him through that night, weak and exhausted as he was, was the thought, 'Burnett let them down; Burnett let them down; I 'm not going to let them down.' Anyhow he did very well.

But in the morning he was carried down to the beach in a high fever. And perhaps it was just as well, for I think Burnett would have done him a mischief.

VII

SO Harry stayed till he was 'pushed' off, as he had promised. And I was glad he had gone like that. I had long wanted him to leave the Peninsula somehow, for I felt he should be spared for greater things, but, knowing something of his peculiar temperament, I did not want his career there to end on a note of simple failure—a dull surrender to sickness in the rest-camp. As it turned out, the accident of the digging-party, and the way in which Harry had seized his chance, sent him off with a renewed confidence in himself and, with regard to Burnett, even a sense of triumph. So I was not surprised when his letters began to reveal something of the old enthusiastic Harry, chafing at the dreary routine of the Depot, and looking for adventure again. But I am anticipating.

They sent him home, of course. It was no good keeping any one in his condition at Egypt or Malta, for the prolonged dysentery had produced the usual complications. I had a letter from Malta, and one from the Mediterranean Club at Gibraltar, where he had a sultry week looking over the bay, seeing the ships steam out for England, he told me, and longing to be in one. For it took many months to wash

away the taste of the Peninsula, and much more than the austere comforts of the hospital at Gibraltar. Even the hot August sun in the Alameda was hatefully reminiscent. Then six weeks' milk diet at a hospital in Devonshire, convalescence, and a month's leave.

Then Harry married a wife. I did not know the lady—a Miss Thickness—and she does not come into the story very much, though she probably affected it a good deal. Wives usually do affect a soldier's story, though they are one of the many things which by the absolute official standard of military duty are necessarily not reckoned with at all. Not being the president of a court-martial I did reckon with it; and when I had read Harry's letter about his wedding I said: 'We shan't see *him* again.' For in those early years it was generally assumed that a man returned from service at the front need not go out again (unless he wished) for a period almost incalculably prolonged. And, being a newly married man myself, I had no reason to suppose that Harry would want to rush into the breach just yet.

But about May—that would be 1916; we had done with Gallipoli and come to France, after four months' idling in the Aegean Islands —I had another letter, much delayed, from which I will give you an extract:

'*I never thought I should want to go out again*

(you remember we all swore we never should), but I do. I'm fed to the teeth with this place (the Depot, in Dorsetshire); *nothing but company drill and lectures on march discipline, and all the old stuff. We still attack Hill 219 twice weekly in exactly the same way, and still no one but a few of the officers knows exactly which hill it is, since we always stop halfway for lunch-time, or because there's hopeless confusion. . . . There's nobody amusing here. Williams has got a company and swanks like blazes about 'the front,' but I think most people see through him. . . . My wife's got rooms in a cottage near here, but they won't let me sleep out, and I don't get there till pretty late most days. . . . Can't you get the Colonel to apply for me? I don't believe it's allowed, but he's sure to be able to wangle it. Otherwise I shall be here for the rest of the war, because the more you've been out the less likely you are to get out again, if you want to, while there are lots who don't want to go, and wouldn't be any earthly good, and stand in hourly danger of being sent. . . . I want to see France. . . .'*

I answered on a single sheet:

'All very well, but what about Mrs. P.? Does she concur?' (I told you I was a married man.)

His answer was equally brief:

'She doesn't know, but she would.'

Well, it wasn't my business, so we 'wangled'

it (I was adjutant then), and Harry came out to France. But I was sorry for Mrs. Penrose.

II

I do not know if all this seems tedious and unnecessary ; I hope not, for it is very relevant to the end of the story, and if this record had been in the hands of certain persons the end of the story might have been different. I do not know. Certainly it ought to have been different.

Anyhow, Harry came to France and found us in the line at Souchez. The recuperative power of the young soldier is marvellous. No one but myself would have said that this was not the same Harry of a year ago ; for he was fit and fresh and bubbling over with keenness. Only myself, who had sat over the Dardanelles with him and talked about Troy, knew what was missing. There were no more romantic illusions about war, and, I think, no more military ambitions. Only he was sufficiently rested to be very keen again, and had not yet seen enough of it to be ordinarily bored.

And in that summer of 1916 there was much to be said for life in the Souchez sector. It was a ' peace-time ' sector, where divisions stayed for months at a time, and one went in and out like clockwork at ritual intervals, each time into the same trenches, the same deep dug-outs,

each time back to the same billets, or the same huts in the same wood. All the deserted fields about the line were a mass of poppies and corn-flowers, and they hung over one in extravagant masses as one walked up the communication trench. In the thick woods round Bouvigny and Noulette there were clusters of huts where the resting-time was very warm and lazy and companionable, with much white wine and singing in the evenings. Or one took a horse and rode into Coupigny or Barlin where there had not been too much war, but one could dine happily at the best estaminet, and then ride back contentedly under the stars.

In the line also there was not too much war. Few of the infantry on either side ever fired their rifles ; and only a few bombers with rifle grenades tried to injure the enemy. There were short sectors of the line on either side which became spasmodically dangerous because of these things, and at a fixed hour each day the Germans blew the same portions of the line to dust with minenwerfers, our men having departed elsewhere half an hour previously, according to the established routine from which neither side ever diverged. Our guns were very busy by spasms, and every day destroyed small sections of the thick red masses of the German wire, which were every night religiously repaired. The German guns were very few, for the Somme

battle was raging, but at times they flung whizz-bangs vaguely about the line or dropped big shells on the great brows of the Lorette Heights behind us. From the high ground we held there was a good view, with woods and red and white villages on the far hills beyond the Germans ; and away to the left one looked over the battered pit country towards Lens, with the tall pit-towers everywhere, all crumpled and bent into uncouth shapes, and grey slag-heaps rising like the Pyramids out of a wilderness of broken red cottages. To the south-east began the Vimy Ridge, where the red Pimple frowned over the lines at the Lorette Heights and all day there was the foam and blackness of bursting shells.

In the night there was much patrolling and bursts of machine-gun fire, and a few snipers, and enormous labours at the ' improvement of the line,' wiring and revetting, and exquisite work with sand-bags.

It was all very gentle and friendly and artificial, and we were happy together.

Burnett had left us, on some detached duty or other, and in that gentler atmosphere Eustace was a good companion again.

Men grew lusty and well, and one could have continued there indefinitely without much injury to body or mind. But sometimes on a clear night we saw all the southern sky afire

from some new madness on the Somme, and knew that somewhere in France there was real war. The correspondents wrote home that the regiments 'condemned so long to the deadening inactivity of trench warfare were longing only for their turn at the Great Battle.' No doubt they had authority: though I never met one of those regiments. For our part we were happy where we were. We had had enough for the present.

III

But I digress. And yet—no. For I want you to keep this idea of the diversity of war conditions before you, and how a man may be in a fighting unit for many months and yet go unscathed even in spirit. Or in the most Arcadian parts of the battle area he may come alone against some peculiar shock from which he never recovers. It is all chance.

We made Harry scout officer again, and he was very keen. Between us and the German lines was a honeycomb of old disused trenches where French and Germans had fought for many months before they sat down to watch each other across this maze. They were all overgrown now with flowers and thick grasses, but for the purposes of future operations it was important to know all about them, and

every night Harry wriggled out and dropped into one of these to creep and explore, and afterwards put them on the map. Sometimes I went a little way with him, and I did not like it. It was very creepy in those forgotten alleys, worse than crawling outside in the open, I think, because of the intense blackness and the infinite possibilities of ambush.

The Boches, we knew, were playing the same game as ourselves, and might always be round the next traverse, so that every ten yards one went through a new ordeal of expectancy and stealthy, strained investigation. One stood breathless at the corner, listening, peering, quivering with the strain of it, and then a rat dropped into the next 'bay,' or behind us one of our Lewis guns blazed off a few bursts, shattering the silence. Surely there was some one near moving hurriedly under cover of the noise! Then you stood again, stiff and cramped with the stillness, and you wanted insanely to cough, or shift your weight on to the other foot, your nose itched and the grasses tickled your ear—but you must not stir, must hardly breathe. For now all the lines have become mysteriously hushed, and no man fires; far away one can hear the rumble of the German limbers coming up with rations to the dump, and the quiet becomes unbearable, so that you long for some Titanic explosion to break it and set you free

from waiting. Then a machine-gun opens again, and you slip round the corner to find—nothing at all, only more blackness and the rats scuttling away into the grass, and perhaps the bones of a Frenchman. And then you begin all over again. . . . When he has done this sort of thing many times without any happening, an imperfect scout becomes careless through sheer weariness, and begins to blunder noisily ahead. And sooner or later he goes under. But Harry was a natural scout, well trained, and from first to last kept the same care, the same admirable patience, and this means a great strain on body and mind. . . . In those old trenches you could go right up to the German line, two hundred yards away, and this Harry often did. The Germans had small posts at these points, waiting, and were very ready with bombs and rifle grenades. It was a poor look-out if you were heard about there, and perhaps badly wounded, so that you could not move, two hundred yards away from friends and all those happy soldiers who spent their nights comfortably in trenches when you were out there on your stomach. Perhaps your companion would get away and bring help. Or he too might be hit or killed, and then you would lie there for days and nights, alone in a dark hole, with the rats scampering and smelling about you, till you died of starvation or loss of

blood. You would lie there listening to your own men chattering in the distance at their wiring, and neither they nor any one would find you or know where you were, till months hence some other venturesome scout stumbled on your revolver in the dark. Or maybe the line would advance at last, and some salvage party come upon your uniform rotting in the ditch, and they would take off your identity disc and send it in to Head-quarters, and shovel a little earth above your bones. It might be many years.

I am not an imaginative man, but that was the kind of thought I had while I prowled round with Harry (and I never went so far as he). He even had an occasional jest at the Germans, and once planted an old dummy close up to their lines. There was stony ground there, and, as they took it there, he told me, it clattered. The next night he went there again in case the Germans came out to capture 'Reggie.' They did not, but every evening for many months they put a barrage of rifle-grenades all about that dummy.

Then there was much talk of 'raids,' and all the opposite wire had to be patrolled and examined for gaps and weak places. This meant crawling in the open close up to the enemy, naked under the white flares; and sometimes they fell to earth within a few feet of a

scout and sizzled brilliantly for interminable seconds; there was a sniper somewhere near, and perhaps a machine-gun section, and surely they could see him, so large, so illuminated, so monstrously visible he felt. It was easy when there was not too much quiet, but many echoes of scattered shots and the noise of bullets rocketing into space, or long bursts of machine-gun fire, to cover your movements. But when that terrible silence fell it was very difficult. For then how loud was the rustle of your stealthiest wriggle, how sinister the tiny sounds of insects in the grass. Everywhere there were stray strands of old barbed wire which caught in your clothes and needed infinite patience to disentangle; when you got rid of one barb another clung to you as the wire sprang back or, if you were not skilful, it clashed on a post or a rifle, or a tin can, with a noise like cymbals. You came across strange things as you crawled out there—dead bodies, and bits of equipment, and huge unexploded shells. Or you touched a rat or a grass-snake that made you shiver as it moved; the rats and the field-mice ran over you if you lay still for long, and once Harry saw a German patrol-dog sniffing busily in front of him. Sometimes as you went up wind you put your hand suddenly on a dead man, and had to lie close beside him for cover. Or you scented him far off like a dog nosing

through the grass, and made him a landmark whispering to your companion, 'Keep fifty yards from the dead 'un,' or 'Make for the dead Boche.'

When the lights went up you lay very close, peering ahead under your cap; and as they fell away to the ground all your vision became full of moving things and fugitive shadows. The thick rows of wiring posts looked like men working, and that cluster of stone like the head of a man in a shell-hole, watching . . . watching you . . . gone in an instant. . . . Then you waited tensely for the next light. There is the murmur of voices somewhere, very difficult to locate. For a long while you stalk it, ready to attack some patrol, some working-party. Then you hear a familiar Tyneside curse . . . it is A Company wiring, with much noise.

All this, as I have said, is a heavy strain on mind and body and nerve. It requires a peculiar kind of courage, a lonely, cold-blooded kind of courage. Many men who would do well in a slap-dash fight in the light of day are useless as scouts. Not only are they noisy and impatient, but they cannot stand it.

And yet it is no job for a very imaginative man. There are too many things you can imagine, if you once begin. The more you know about it, the more there is to imagine, and the greater the strain becomes. Now

Harry had a very vivid imagination, and he knew all about it—and yet he played the game nearly every night we were in the line for three months . . . nothing theatrical, you understand, nor even heroic by popular standards, no stabbing affrays, no medals . . . but by my standards it *was* very nearly heroic, and I don't know how he did it

But this was forgotten later on.

IV

Then Harry had a shock. There was a large sap running out from our line along the crown of a steep ridge. This sap was not held during the day, but at night was peopled with bombers and snipers, and it was a great starting-place for the patrols. One night Harry went out from this sap and crawled down the face of the ridge. It was a dark night, and the Boches were throwing up many flares. One of these came to earth ten yards from Harry. At that moment he was halfway down the slope, crouched on one knee. However, when flares are about, to keep still in any posture is better than to move, so Harry remained rigid. But one of the new scouts behind was just leaving the sap, and hovered uncertainly on the skyline as the light flared and sizzled below. Possibly he was seen, possibly what

followed was a chance freak of the Germans. Anyhow, a moment later they opened with every machine-gun in the line, with rifles, rifle-grenades, and high-velocity shells. So venomous was the fire that every man in the line believed—and afterwards hotly asserted —that the whole fury of it was concentrated on his particular yard of trench. Few of us thought of the unhappy scouts lying naked outside. Harry, of course, flattened himself to the ground, and tried to wriggle into a hollow ; on level ground you may with luck be safe under wild fire of this kind for a long time. Being on a slope, Harry was hopelessly exposed. 'I lay there,' he told me, 'and simply sweated with funk ; you won't believe me, but at one time I could literally *feel* a stream of machine-gun bullets ruffling my hair, and thudding into the bank just above my back . . . and they dropped half a dozen whizz-bangs just in front of me. While it was going on I couldn't have moved for a thousand pounds. . . . I felt *pinned* to the ground . . . then there was a lull, and I leapt up . . . so did old Smith . . . bolted for the sap, and simply dived in head first . . . they were still blazing off sixteen to the dozen, and it was the mercy of God we weren't hit . . . talk about wind-up. . . . And when we got in two bombers thought it was an attack, and took us for Boches. . . . Rather

funny, while the strafe was going on I kept thinking, "Poor old Smith, he 's a married man" (he was a few yards from me) . . . and Smith tells me *he* was thinking, "Mr. Penrose . . . a married man . . . married man." . . . What about some more whisky?'

Well, he made a joke of it, as one tries to do as long as possible, and that night was almost happily exhilarated, as a man sometimes is after escaping narrowly from an adventure. But I could see that it had been a severe shock. The next night he had a cold and a bad cough, and said he would not go out for fear of 'making a noise and giving the show away.' The following night he went out, but came in very soon, and sat rather glum in the dug-out, thinking of something. (I always waited up till he came in to report, and we used to 'discuss the situation' over some whisky or a little white wine.)

The following day the Colonel gave him a special job to do. There was the usual talk of a 'raid' on a certain section of the enemy lines; but there was a theory that this particular section had been evacuated. Flares were sent up from all parts of it, but this was supposed to be the work of one man, a hard worker, who walked steadily up and down, pretending to be a company. Harry was told off to test the truth of this myth—to get right

up to that trench, to look in, and see what was in it. It was a thing he had done twice before, at least, though myself I should not have cared to do it at all. It meant the usual breathless, toilsome wriggle across No Man's Land, avoiding the flares and the two snipers who covered that bit of ground, finding a gap in the wire, getting through without being seen, without noise, without catching his clothes on a wandering barb, or banging his revolver against a multitude of tin cans. Then you had to listen and wait, and, if possible, get a look into the trench. When (and if) you had done that you had to get back, turn round in a tiny space, pass the same obstacles, the same snipers. If at any stage you were spotted the odds against your getting back at all were extremely large.

However, Harry was a scout, and it was his job. In the afternoon of that day I met him somewhere in the line and made some would-be jocular remark about his night's work. He seemed to me a little worried, preoccupied, and answered shortly. Hewett was sitting near, shaving in the sun, and said to him: 'You 're a nasty, cold-blooded fellow, Harry, crawling about like a young snake every night. But I suppose you like it.'

Harry said slowly, with a casual air: 'Well, so I did, but I must say that strafe the other night put the wind up me properly—and when

I went out last night I found I was thinking all the time, "Suppose they did that again?" . . . and when I got on the top of a ridge or anywhere a bit exposed, I kept imagining what it would be like if all those machine-guns started just then . . . simply dashed into a shell-hole . . . and I found myself working for safe spots where one would be all right in case of accidents. . . . Sort of lost confidence, you know.'

It was all said in a matter-of-fact manner, as if he was saying, 'I don't like marmalade so much as I used to do,' and there was no suggestion that he was not ready to go and look in the Boche front line or the Unter den Linden, if necessary. But I was sorry about this. I told him that he must not imagine; that that strafe was a unique affair, never likely to be repeated. But when I went back to the dug-out I spoke to the Colonel.

That night I went up with Harry to Foster Alley, and watched him writhing away into the grey gloom. There were many stars, and you could follow him for thirty yards. And as I watched I wondered, 'Is he thinking, "*Supposing they do that again?*" and when he gets over near the wire, will he be thinking, "*What would happen if they saw me now?*" If so,' I said, 'God help him,' and went back to Headquarters.

Three hours later he came into the dug-out, where I sat with the Colonel making out an Intelligence Report. He was very white and tired, and while he spoke to the Colonel he stood at the bottom of the muddy steps with his head just out of the candlelight. All the front of his tunic was muddy, and there were two rents in his breeches.

He said, 'Very sorry, sir, but I couldn't get through. I got pretty close to the wire, but couldn't find a gap.' 'Was there much firing?' said the Colonel. 'The usual two snipers and a machine-gun on the left; from what I heard I should say there were a good many men in that part of the trench—but I couldn't swear.' Now what the Colonel had wanted was somebody who *could* swear; that was what the Brigade wanted; so he was not pleased. But he was a kind, understanding fellow, and all he said was, 'Well, I 'm sorry, too, Penrose, but no doubt you did your best.' And he went to bed.

Then I opened some Perrier (we still had Perrier then), and gave Harry a strong whisky, and waited. For I knew that there was more. He talked for a little, as usual, about the mud, and the Boche line, and so on, and then he said: 'What I told the Colonel was perfectly true—I did get pretty close to the wire, and there wasn't a gap to be seen—but that wasn't

the whole of it . . . I couldn't face it. . . . The truth is, that show the other night was too much for me. . . . I found myself lying in a shell-hole pretending to myself that I was listening, and watching, and so on, but really absolutely stuck, trying to *make* myself go on . . . and I couldn't. . . . I 'm finished as a scout . . . that's all.'

Well, it was all for the present. No thinking, human C.O. is going to run a man in for being beaten by a job like that. It is a specialist's affair, like firing a gun. It is his business to put the right man on the job, and if he doesn't, he can't complain.

So we made Harry Lewis Gun officer. And that was the first stage.

VIII

SOON after that we went down to the Somme. It was autumn then, and all that desolate area of stark brown earth was wet and heavy and stinking. Down the Ancre valley there were still some leaves in Thiepval Wood, and the tall trees along the river were green and beautiful in the thin October sun. But the centre of battle was coming up to that valley ; in a month the green was all gone, and there was nothing to see but the endless uniform landscape of tumbled earth and splintered trunks, and only the big shells raising vain waterspouts in the wide pools of the Ancre gave any brightness to the tired eye.

But you know about all this. Every Englishman has a picture of the Somme in his mind, and I will not try to enlarge it. We were glad, in a way, to go there, not in the expectation of liking it, but on the principle of Henry V's speech on the eve of St. Crispin. We saw ourselves in hospitals, or drawing-rooms, or bars, saying, 'Yes, we were six months on the Somme' (as indeed we were) ; we were going to be 'in the swing.' But it was very vile. After Souchez it was real war again, and many Souchez reputations wilted there and died.

Yet with all its horror and discomfort and fear that winter was more bearable than the Gallipoli summer. For, at the worst, there was a little respite, spasms of repose. You came back sometimes to billets, cold, bare, broken houses, but still houses, where you might make a brave blaze of a wood fire and huddle round it in a cheery circle with warm drinks and a song or two. And sometimes there were estaminets and kind French women ; or you went far back to an old château, perched over the village, and there was bridge and a piano and guests at Headquarters. Civilization was within reach, and sometimes you had a glimpse of it—and made the most of it.

But we had a bad time, as every one did. After a stiff three weeks of holding a nasty bit of the line, much digging of assembly trenches, and carrying in the mud, we took our part in a great battle. I shall not tell you about it (it is in the histories) ; but it was a black day for the battalion. We lost 400 men and 20 officers, more than twice the total British casualties at Omdurman. Hewett was killed and six other officers, the Colonel and twelve more were wounded. Eustace showed superb courage with a hideous wound. Harry and myself survived. Now I had made a mistake about Harry. After that scouting episode at

Souchez I told myself that his 'nerve' was gone, that for a little anyhow he would be no good in action. But soon after we got to the Somme he had surprised me by doing a very good piece of work under fire. We were digging a new 'jumping-off' line in No Man's Land, two hundred men at work at once. They were spotted, the Boches dropped some Minnies about, and there was the beginning of a slight stampede—you know the sort of thing—mythical orders to 'Retire' came along. All Harry did was to get the men back and keep them together, and keep them digging, the officer's job—but he did very well, and to me, as I say, surprisingly well. The truth was, as I afterwards perceived, that only what I may call his 'scouting' nerve was gone. It is a peculiar kind of super-nerve, as I have tried to show, and losing it he had lost a very valuable quality, but that was all at present.

Or I may put it another way. There is a theory held among soldiers, which I will call the theory of the favourite fear. Every civilian has his favourite fear, death by burning or by drowning, the fear of falling from a great height, or being mangled in a machine—something which it makes him shiver to think about. Among soldiers such special fears are even more acute, though less openly confessed, but in the evenings men will sometimes lie on

the straw in the smoky barns and whisper the things of which they are most afraid.

It is largely a matter of locality and circumstance. In Gallipoli, where the Turks' rapid musketry fire was almost incredibly intense and their snipers uncannily accurate, men would say that they hated bullets, but shell-fire left them unmoved. The same men travelled to France and found rifle-fire practically extinct but gun-power increasingly terrible, and rapidly reversed their opinions.

More often, however, there has been some particular experience which, out of a multitude of shocks, has been able to make a lasting impression, and leave behind it the favourite fear.

One man remembers the death of a friend caught by the gas without his gas mask and is possessed with the fear that he may one day forget his own and perish in the same agony. And such is the effect on conduct of these obsessions that this man will neglect the most ordinary precautions against other dangers, will be reckless under heavy shell-fire, but will not move an inch without his respirator.

With others it is the fear of being left to die between the lines, caught on the wire and riddled by both sides, the fear of snipers, of 5·9's, even of whizz-bangs. One man feels safe in the open, but in the strongest dug-out has a horror that it may be blown in upon him.

There is the fear of the empty trench, where, like a child on the dark staircase, another man is convinced that there are enemies lying behind the parapet ready to leap upon him; and there is the horror of being killed on the way down from the line after a relief.

But most to be pitied of all the men I have known, was one who had served at Gallipoli in the early days; few men then could have an orderly burial in a recognized ground, but often the stretcher-bearers buried them hastily where they could in and about the lines. This man's fear was that one day a sniper would get him in the head; that unskilled companions would pronounce his death sentence, and that he would wake up, perhaps within a few yards of his own trench, and know that he was buried but not dead.

That was how it was with Harry. The one thing he could not face at present was crawling lonely in the dark with the thought of that tornado of bullets in his head. Nothing else frightened him—now—more than it frightened the rest of us, though, God knows, that was enough.

So that he did quite well in this battle in a sound, undistinguished way. He commanded a platoon for the occasion, and took them through the worst part of the show without exceptional losses; and he got as far as any

of the regiment got. He held out there for two days under very heavy shell-fire, with a mixed lot of men from several battalions, and a couple of strange officers. In the evening of the second day we were to be relieved, and being now in command I sent him down with a runner to Brigade Headquarters to fix up a few points about our position and the relief. There was a terrific barrage to pass, but both of them got through. When his business was done he started back to rejoin the battalion. By that time it was about eleven o'clock at night, and the relief was just beginning; there was no reason why he should have come back at all; indeed, the Brigade Major told him he had better not, had better wait there in the warm dug-out, and join us as we passed down. Now when a man has been through a two-days' battle of this kind, has had no sleep and hardly any food for two days, and finished up with a two-mile trudge over a stony wilderness of shell-holes, through a vicious barrage of heavy shells; when after all this he finds himself, worn and exhausted so that he can hardly stand, but safe and comfortable in a deep dug-out where there are friendly lights and the soothing voices of calm men; and when he has the choice of staying there, the right side of the barrage, till it is time to go out to rest, or of going back through that same barrage,

staggering into the same shell-holes, with the immediate prospect *of doing it all over again with men to look after as well as himself*—well, the temptation is almost irresistible. But Harry did resist it—I can't tell you how—and he started back. The barrage was worse than ever, all down the valley road, and, apparently, when they came near the most dangerous part, Harry's runner was hit by a big splinter and blown twenty yards. There were no stretchers unoccupied for five miles, and it was evident that the boy—he was only a kid—would die in a little time. He knew it himself, but he was very frightened in that hideous valley where the shells still fell, and he begged Harry not to leave him. And so we came upon them as we stumbled down, thanking our stars we were through the worst of it, Harry and the runner crouched together in a shell-hole, with the heart of the barrage blazing and roaring sixty yards off, and stray shells all round.

From a military or, indeed, a common-sense point of view, it was a futile performance—the needless risk of a valuable officer's life.

They do not give decorations for that kind of thing. But I was glad he had stayed with that young runner.

And I only tell you this to show you how wrong I was, and how much stuff he had in him still.

II

And now Colonel Philpott comes into the story. I wish to God he had kept out of it altogether. He was one of a class of officer with which our division was specially afflicted —at least we believed so, if only for the credit of the British Army; for if they were typical of the Old Army I do not know how we came out of 1914 with as much honour as we did. But I am happy to know they were not. We called them the Old Duds, and we believed that for some forgotten sin of ours, or because of a certain strong 'Temporary' spirit we had, they were dumped upon us by way of penalty. We had peculiarly few Regular officers, and so perhaps were inclined to be extra critical of these gentlemen. Anyhow, at one time they came in swarms, lazy, stupid, ignorant men, with many years of service—retired, reserve, or what not—but no discoverable distinction either in intellect, or character, or action. And when they had told us about Simla and all the injustices they had suffered in the matter of promotion or pay, they ousted some young and vigorous Temporary fellow who at least knew something of fighting, if there were stray passages in the King's Regulations which he did not know by heart; and in about a week their commands were

discontented and slack. In about two months they were evacuated sick (for they had no 'guts,' most of them), and that was the finest moment of their careers—for them and for us.

Lt.-Col. (Temp'y) W. K. Philpott (Substantive Captain) out-dudded them all, though, to give him his due, he had more staying power than most of them. He took over the battalion when Colonel Roberts was wounded, and the contrast was painfully acute. I was his adjutant for twelve months in all, and an adjutant knows most things about his C.O. He was a short, stoutish fellow, with beady eyes and an unsuccessful moustache, slightly grey, like a stubble-field at dawn. He had all the exaggerated respect for authority and his superiors of the old-school Regular, with none of its sincerity; for while he said things about the Brigadier which no colonel should say before a junior officer, he positively cringed when they met. And though he bullied defaulters, and blustered about his independence before juniors, there was no superior military goose to whom he would have said the most diffident 'Bo!' He was lazy beyond words, physically and mentally, but to see him double out of the mess when a general visited the village was an education.

Then, of course, he believed very strongly in 'The Book,' not Holy Writ, but all that

mass of small red publications which expound the whole art of being a soldier in a style calculated to invest with mystery the most obvious truths. 'It says it in The Book' was his great gambit—and a good one too. Yet he betrayed the most astonishing ignorance of The Book. Any second-lieutenant could have turned him inside out in two minutes on Field Service Regulations, and just where you expected him to be really efficient and knowledgeable, the conduct of trials, and Military Law, and so on, he made the most elementary howlers.

But ignorance is easily forgivable if a man will work, if a man will learn. But he would neither. He left everything to somebody else, the second-in-command, the adjutant, the orderly-room. He would not say what he wanted (he very seldom knew), and when in despair you made out his orders for him he invariably disagreed; when he disagreed he was as obstinate as a mule, without being so clever. When he did agree it took half an hour to explain the simplest arrangement. If you asked him to sign some correspondence for the Brigade, he was too lazy and told you to sign it yourself; and when you did that he apologized to the Brigade for the irregularities of his adjutant—'a Temporary fellow, you know.' For he had an ill-concealed contempt for all Temporaries; and that was perhaps

one reason why we disliked him so much. He would not believe that a young officer, who had not spent twenty years drinking in mess-rooms, could have any military value whatever. Moreover, it annoyed him intensely (and here he had my sympathy) to see such men enjoying the same pay or rank as he had enjoyed during the protracted period of his captaincy. And having himself learned practically nothing during that long lotus-time, it was inconceivable to him that any man, however vigorous or intelligent, could have learned anything in two years of war.

Now let me repeat that I do not believe him to be typical of the Old Army, I know he was not (thank God); but this is a history of what happened to Harry, and Colonel Philpott was one of the things which happened—very forcibly. So I give him to you as we found him, and since he may be alive I may say that his name is fictitious, though there are, unhappily, so many of him alive that I have no fears that he will recognize himself. He would not be the same man if he did.

We went out for a fortnight's rest after that battle, and Harry had trouble with him almost at once. He had amused and irritated Harry from the first—the Old Duds always did—for his respect for authority was very civilian and youthful in character; he took a man

for what he was, and if he decided he was good stood by him loyally for ever after; if he did not he was severe, not to say intolerant.

Philpott's arrogance on the subject of Temporaries annoyed him intensely; it also annoyed us all, and this I think it was that made him say a very unfortunate thing. He was up before the C.O. with some trifling request or other (I forget what), and somehow the question of his seniority and service came up. Incidentally, Harry remarked, quite mildly, that he believed he was nearly due for promotion. Colonel Philpott gave as close an imitation of a lively man as I ever saw him achieve; he nearly had a fit. I forget all he said—he thundered for a long time, banging his fist on the King's Regulations, and knocking everything off the rickety table—but this was the climax:

'Promotion, by God! and how old are you, young man? and how much service have you seen? Let me tell you this, Master Penrose, when I was your age I hadn't begun to *think* about promotion, and I did fifteen years as a captain—fifteen solid years!'

'You amaze me, sir,' said Harry.

It was very wrong; and unfortunate.

III

When we went back to the line, Harry was detailed for many working-parties ; and some of them, particularly the first, were very nasty. The days of comfortable walking in communication trenches were over. We were in captured ground churned up by our own fire, and all communication with the front was over the open, over the shell-holes. Harry was told off to take a ration-party, carrying rations up to the battalion in the line, a hundred men. These were bad jobs to do. It meant three-quarters of a mile along an uphill road, heavily shelled ; then there was a mile over the shell-hole country, where there were no landmarks or duckboards, nor anything to guide you. For a single man in daylight, with a map, navigation was difficult enough in this uniform wilderness until you had been over it a time or two ; to go over it for the first time, in the dark, with a hundred men carrying heavy loads, was the kind of thing that makes men transfer to the Flying Corps. Harry got past the road with the loss of three men only ; there, at any rate, you went straight ahead, however slowly. But when he left the road his real troubles began. It was pitch dark and drizzling, and the way was still uphill. With those unhappy carrying-parties, where three-fourths of the men carried

two heavy sacks of bread and tinned meat and other food, and the rest two petrol tins of water, or a jar of rum, or rifle oil, or whale oil, besides a rifle, and a bandolier, and two respirators, and a great-coat—you must move with exquisite slowness, or you will lose your whole party in a hundred yards. And even when you are just putting one foot in front of another, moving so slowly that it maddens you, there are halts and hitches every few yards: a man misses his footing and slides down into a crater with his awful load; the hole is full of foul green water, and he must be hauled out quickly lest he drown. Halfway down the line a man halts to ease his load, or shift his rifle, or scratch his nose; when he goes on he can see no one ahead of him, and the cry 'Not in touch' comes sullenly up to the front. Or you cross the path of another party, burdened as yours. In the dark, or against the flaring skyline, they look like yours, bent, murky shapes with bumps upon them, and some of your men trail off with the other party. And though you pity your men more than yourself, it is difficult sometimes to be gentle with them, difficult not to yield to the intense exasperation of it all, and curse foolishly.

But Harry was good with his men, and they stumbled on, slipping, muttering, with a dull ache at the shoulders and a dogged rage

in their hearts. He was trying to steer by the compass, and he was aiming for a point given him on the map, the rendezvous for the party he was to meet. This point was the junction of three trenches, but as all trenches thereabouts had been so blotted out as to be almost indistinguishable from casual shell-holes, it was not so good a rendezvous as it had seemed to the Brigade. However, Harry managed to find it, or believed that he had found it—for in that murk and blackness nothing was certain ; if he had found it, the other party had not, for there was no one there. They might be late, they might be lost, they might be waiting elsewhere. So Harry sent out a scout or two and waited, while the men lay down in the muddy ruins of the trench and dozed unhappily. And while they waited the Boche, who had been flinging big shells about at random since dusk, took it into his head to plaster these old trenches with 5·9's. Harry ran, or floundered, along the line, telling the men to lie close where they were. There was indeed nothing else to do, but it gave the men confidence, and none of them melted away. As he ran, a big one burst very near and knocked him flat, but he was untouched ; it is marvellous how local the effect of H.E. can be. For about ten minutes they had a bad time, and then it ceased, suddenly.

And now was one of those crucial moments which distinguish a good officer from a bad, or even an ordinary officer. It was easy to say, 'Here I am at the rendezvous' (by this time Harry had got his bearings a little by the lights, and knew he was in the right spot) 'with these bloody rations; the men are done and a bit shaken; so am I; the other people haven't turned up; if they want their rations they can damned well come here and get them; I've done my part, and I'm going home.' But a real good officer, with a conscience and an imagination, would say: 'Yes—but I've been sent up here to get these rations to the men in the line; my men will have a rest to-morrow, and some sleep, and some good food; the men in the line now will still be in the line, with no sleep, and little rest, and if these rations are left here in the mud and not found before dawn, they'll have no food either; and whatever other people may do or not do, it's up to me to get these rations up there somehow, if we have to walk all night and carry them right up to the front line ourselves, and I'm not going home till I've done it.' I don't know, but I think that that's the sort of thing Harry said to himself; and anyhow after the row with Philpott he was particularly anxious to make good. So he got his men out and told them about it all,

and they floundered on. It was raining hard now, with a bitter wind when they passed the crest of the hill. Harry had a vague idea of the direction of the line so long as they were on the slope; but on the flat, when they had dodged round a few hundred shell-holes, halting and going on and halting again, all sense of direction departed, and very soon they were hopelessly lost. The flares were no good, for the line curved, and there seemed to be lights all around, going up mistily through the rain in a wide circle. Once you were properly lost the compass was useless, for you might be in the Boche lines, you might be anywhere. . . . At such moments a kind of mad, desperate self-pity, born of misery and weariness and rage, takes hold of the infantryman, and if he carries a load he is truly ready to fall down and sleep where he is—or die. And in the wretched youth in charge there is a sense of impotence and responsibility that makes his stomach sink within him. Some of the men began to growl a little, but Harry held on despairingly. And then by God's grace they ran into another party, an N.C.O. and a few men; these were the party—or some of them—that should have met them at the rendezvous; they too had been lost and were now wandering back to the line. Well, Harry handed over the rations and

turned home, well pleased with himself. He was too sick of the whole affair, and it was too dark and beastly to think of getting a receipt. It was a pity; for while he trudged home, the N.C.O., as we afterwards heard, was making a mess of the whole business. Whether he had not enough men or perhaps lost them, or miscalculated the amount of rations or what is not clear, but half of all that precious food was found lying in the mud at noon the next day when it was too late, and half the battalion in the line went very short. Then the Colonel rang up Philpott, and complained bitterly about the conduct of the officer in charge of our ration-party. Philpott sent for Harry and accused him hotly of dumping the rations carelessly anywhere, of not finishing his job.

Harry gave his account of the affair quite simply, without enlarging on the bad time he had had, though that was clear enough to a man with any knowledge. *But he could not show a receipt.* Philpott was the kind of man who valued receipts more than righteousness. He refused to believe Harry's straightforward tale, cursed him for a lazy swine, and sent him to apologize to the Colonel of the Blanks. That officer did listen to Harry's story, believed it, and apologized to *him.* Harry was a little soothed, but from that day I know there was a great bitterness in his heart. For he had

done a difficult job very well, and had come back justly proud of himself and his men. And to have the work wasted by a bungling N.C.O., and his word doubted by a Philpott. . . .

And that I may call the beginning of the second stage.

IX

FOR after that Harry began to be in a bad way again. That shelling in the night and the near concussion of the shell that knocked him over had been one of those capital shocks of which I have spoken. From that time on, shell-fire in the open became a special terror, a new favourite fear; afterwards he told me so. And all that winter we had shell-fire in the open—even the 'lines' were not trenches, only a string of scattered shell-holes garrisoned by a few men. Everywhere, night and day, you had that naked feeling.

Yet in France, at the worst, given proper rest and variety, with a chance to nurse his courage and soothe his nerves, a resolute man could struggle on a long time after he began to crack. But Harry had no rest, no chance. The *affaire Philpott* was having a rich harvest. For about three weeks in the February of that awful winter the battalion was employed solely on working-parties, all sorts of them, digging, carrying, behind the line, in the line, soft jobs, terrible jobs. Now as adjutant I used to take particular care that the safe jobs in the rear should be fairly shared among the companies in a rough rotation, and that no

officers or men should have too many of the bad ones—the night carrying-parties to the front line. But about now Colonel Philpott began to exert himself about these parties; he actually issued orders about the arrangements, and whether by accident or design his orders had this particular effect that Harry took about three times as many of the dangerous parties as anybody else. We were in a country of rolling down with long trough-like valleys or ravines between. To get to the front line you had to cross two of these valleys, and in each of them the Boche put a terrific barrage all night, and every night. The second one—the Valley of Death—was about as near to Inferno as I wish to see, for it was enfiladed from both ends, and you had shell-fire from three directions. Well, for three weeks Harry took a party through this valley four or five nights a week. . . . Each party meant a double passage through two corners of hell, with a string of weary men to keep together and encourage and command, with all that maddening accumulation of difficulties I have tried already to describe . . . and at the end of that winter, after all he had done, it was too much. I protested to the Colonel, but it was no good. 'Master Penrose can go on with these parties,' he said, 'till he learns how to do them properly.'

After ten days of this Harry began to be afraid of himself; or, as he put it, 'I don't know if I can stand much more of this.' All his old distrust of himself, which lately I think he had very successfully kept away, came creeping back. But he made no complaint; he did not ask me to intercede with Philpott. The more he hated and feared these parties, the worse he felt, the keener became his determination to stick it out, to beat Philpott at his own game. Or so I imagine. For by the third week there was no doubt; what is called his 'nerve' was clean gone; or, as he put it to me in the soldier's tongue, 'I 've got complete wind-up.' He would have given anything—except his pride—to have escaped one of those parties; he thought about them all day. I did manage, in sheer defiance of Philpott, to take him off one of them; but it was only sheer dogged will-power, and perhaps the knowledge that we were to be relieved the following week, which carried him through to the end of it.

If we had not gone out I don't know what would have happened. But I can guess.

II

And so Philpott finally broke his nerve. But he was still keen and resolute to go on, in

spite of the bitterness in his heart. Philpott —and other things—had still to break his spirit. And the 'other things' were many that winter. It was a long, cold, comfortless winter. Billets became more and more broken and windowless and lousy; firewood vanished, and there was little coal. On the high slopes there was a bitter wind, and men went sick in hundreds—pneumonia, fever, frost-bite. All dug-outs were damp and chilling and greasy with mud, or full of the acrid smoke of damp wood that tortured the eyes. There were night advances in the snow, where lightly wounded men perished of exposure before dawn. For a fortnight we lived in tents on a hill-top covered with snow.

And one day Harry discovered he was lousy.

Then, socially, though it seems a strange thing to say, these were dull days for Harry. Few people realize how much an infantryman's life is lightened if he has companions of his own kind—not necessarily of the same class, though it usually comes to that—but of the same tastes and education and experience —men who make the same kind of jokes. In the line it matters little, a man is a man, as the Press will tell you. But in the evenings, out at rest, it was good and cheering to sit with the Old Crowd and exchange old stories of Gallipoli and Oxford and London; even

to argue with Eustace about the Public Schools; to be with men who liked the same songs, the same tunes on the gramophone, who did not always ask for 'My Dixie Bird' or 'The Green Woman' waltz. . . . And now there was none of the Old Crowd left, only Harry and myself, Harry with a company now, and myself very busy at Headquarters. And Harry's company were very dull men, promoted N.C.O.'s mostly, good fellows all—very good in the line—but they were not the Old Crowd. Now, instead of those great evenings we used to have, with the white wine, and the music, and old George dancing, evenings that have come down in the history of the battalion as our battles have done, evenings that kept the spirit strong in the blackest times—there were morose men with wooden faces sitting silently over some whisky and Battalion Orders.

And Hewett was dead, the laughing, lovable Hewett. That was the black heart of it. When a man becomes part of the great machine, he is generally supposed—I know not why—to surrender with his body his soul and his affections and all his human tendernesses. But it is not so.

We never talked of Hewett very much. Only there was for ever a great gap. And sometimes, when we tried to be cheerful in the

evenings, as in the old times, and were not, we said to each other—Harry and I—'I wish to God that he was here.' Yet for long periods I forgot Hewett. Harry never forgot him.

Then there was something about which I may be wrong, for Harry never mentioned it, and I am only guessing from my own opinion. In two years of war he had won no kind of medal or distinction—except a 'mention' in despatches, which is about as satisfying as a caraway-seed to a starving man. In Gallipoli he had done things which in France in modern times would have earned an easy decoration. But they were scarce in those days; and in France he had done much dogged and difficult work, and a few very courageous, but in a military sense perfectly useless things, nothing dramatic, nothing to catch the eye of the Brigade. I don't know whether he minded much, but I felt it myself very keenly; for I knew that he had started with ambitions; and here were fellows with not half his service, or courage, or capacity, just ordinary men with luck, ablaze with ribbon. . . . Any one who says he cares nothing about medals is a hypocrite, though most of us care very little. But if you believe you have done well, and not only is there nothing to show for it, but nothing to show that other people believe it, you can't help caring.

And then, on top of it, when you have a genuine sense of bitter injustice, when you know that your own most modest estimate of yourself is exalted compared with the estimate of the man who commands you—you begin to have black moods.

III

Harry had black moods. All these torments accumulated and broke his spirit. He lost his keenness, his cheerfulness, and his health. Once a man starts on that path, his past history finds him out, like an old wound. Some men take to drink and are disgraced. In Harry's case it was Gallipoli. No man who had a bad time in that place ever 'got over' it in body or soul. And when France or some other campaign began to work upon them, it was seen that there was something missing in their resisting power; they broke out with old diseases and old fears . . . the legacies of Gallipoli.

Harry grew pale, and nervous, and hunted to look at; and he had a touch of dysentery. But the worst of the poison was in his mind and heart. For a long time, as I have said, since he felt the beginning of those old doubts, and saw himself starting downhill, he had striven anxiously to keep his name high in

men's opinion; for all liked him and believed in him. He had been ready for anything, and done his work with a conscientious pride. But now this bitterness was on him, he seemed to have ceased to care what happened or what men thought of him. He had unreasonable fits of temper; he became distrustful and cynical. I thought then, sometimes, of the day when he had looked at Troy and wanted to be like Achilles. It was painful to me to hear him talking as Eustace used to talk, suspicious, intolerant, incredulous. . . . I thought how Harry had once hated that kind of talk, and it was most significant of the change that had come over the good companion I had known. Yet sometimes, when the sun shone, and once when we rode back into Albert and dined quietly alone, that mask of bitterness fell away; there were flashes of the old cheerful Harry, and I had hopes. I hoped Philpott would be killed.

IV

But he survived, for he was very careful. And though, as I have said, he stuck it for a long time, he was by no means the gallant fire-eater you would have imagined from his treatment of defaulters. Once round the line just before dawn was enough for him in that sort of

country. 'Things are quiet then, and you can see what 's going on.' He liked it best when 'things were quiet.' So did all of us, and I don't blame him for that.

But that winter there was a thick crop of S.I.W.'s. S.I.W. is the short title for a man who has been 'evacuated' with self-inflicted wounds —shot himself in the foot, or held a finger over the muzzle of his rifle, or dropped a great boulder on his foot—done himself any reckless injury to escape from the misery of it all. It was always a marvel to me that any man who could find courage to do such things could not find courage to go on; I suppose they felt it would bring them the certainty of a little respite, and beyond that they did not care, for it was the uncertainty of their life that had broken them. You could not help being sorry for these men, even though you despised them. It made you sick to think that any man who had come voluntarily to fight for his country could be brought so low, that humanity could be so degraded exactly where it was being so ennobled.

But Philpott had no such qualms. He was ruthless, and necessarily so; but, beyond that, he was brutal, he bullied. When they came before him, healed of their wounds, haggard, miserable wisps of men, he kept them standing there while he told them at length exactly how

low they had sunk (they knew that well enough, poor devils), and flung at them a rich vocabulary of abuse—words of cowardice and dishonour, which were strictly accurate but highly unnecessary. For these men were going back to duty now; they had done their punishment—though the worst of it was still to come; all they needed was a few quiet words of encouragement from a strong man to a weaker, a little human sympathy, and that appeal to a man's honour which so seldom fails if it is rightly made.

Well, this did not surprise me in Philpott; he had no surprises for me by now. What did surprise me was Harry's intolerant, even cruel, comments on the cases of the S.I.W.'s. He had always had a real sympathy with the men, he knew the strange workings of their minds, and all the wretchedness of their lives; he understood them. And yet here he was, as scornful, as Prussian, on the subject of S.I.W.'s as even Philpott. It was long before I understood this—I don't know that I ever did. But I thought it was this: that in these wrecks of men he recognized something of his own sufferings; and recognizing the disease he was the more appalled by the remedy they took. The kind of thing that had led them to it was the kind of thing he had been through, was going through. There the connection ceased. There was no

such way out for him. But though it ceased, the connection was so close that it was degrading. And this scorn and anger was a kind of instinctive self-defence—put on to assure himself, to assure the world, that there was no connection—none at all. . . . But I don't know.

V

At the end of February I was wounded and went home. Without any conceit, without exaggerating our friendship, I may say that this was the final blow for Harry. I was the last of the Old Crowd ; I was the one man who knew the truth of things as between him and Philpott. And I went.

I was hit by a big shell at Whizz-Bang Corner, and Harry saw me on the stretcher as we came past D Company on the Bapaume Road. He walked with me as far as the cookers, and was full of concern for my wound, which was pretty painful just then. But he bucked me up and talked gaily of the good things I was going to. And he said nothing of himself. But when he left me there was a look about him—what is the word ?—*wistful*—it is the only one—like a dog left behind.

While I was still in hospital I had two letters from the battalion. The first was from Harry,

a long wail about Philpott and the dullness of everybody now that the Old Crowd were extinct, though he seemed to have made good friends of some of the dull ones. At the end of that endless winter, when it seemed as if the spring would never come, they had pulled out of the line and 'trekked' up north, so that there had been little fighting. They were now in shell-holes across the high ridge in front of Arras, preparing for an advance.

The other letter was from old Knight, the Quartermaster, dated two months after I left. I will give you an extract:

'*Probably by now you will have seen or heard from young Penrose. He was hit on the* 16*th, a nasty wound in the chest from a splinter. . . . It was rather funny—not funny, but you know what I mean—how he got it. I was there myself though I didn't see it. I had been up to H.Q. to see about the rations, and there were a lot of us, Johnson* (*he is now Adj. in your place*) *and Fellowes, and so on, standing outside H.Q.* (*which is on a hill—what you people call a forward slope, I believe*), *and watching our guns bombarding the village. It was a remarkable sight, etc. etc.* [a long digression]. . . . *Then the Boche started shelling our hill; he dropped them in pairs, first of all at the other end of the hill, about* 500 *yards off, and then nearer and nearer, about* 20 *yards at a time . . . . the line they were on was pretty*

near to us, so we thought the dug-out would be a good place to go to. . . . Penrose was just starting to go back to his company when this began, and as we went down somebody told him he 'd better wait a bit. But he said " No, he wanted to get back." I was the last down, and as I disappeared (pretty hurriedly) I told him not to be a fool. But all he said was, " This is nothing, old bird—you wait till you live *up here; I 'm going on." The next thing we heard was the hell of an explosion on top. We ran up afterwards, and there he was, about thirty yards off. . . . The funny thing is that I understood he rather had the wind-up just now, and was anything but reckless . . . in fact, some one said he had the Dug-out Disease. . . . Otherwise, you 'd have said he wanted to be killed. I don't know why he wasn't, asking for it like that. . . . Well, thank God I 'm a Q.M., etc. etc.'*

I read it all very carefully, and wondered. *' You 'd have said he wanted to be killed.'* I wondered about that very much.

And there was a postscript which interested me :

' By the way, I hear Burnett's got the M.C.—for Salvage, I believe ! '

X

I WAS six months in that hospital, and I did not see Harry for seven. For I was at Blackpool, and he at Lady Radmore's in Kensington. His was a quicker business than mine; and when I had finished with the hospitals and the homes and came to London for a three weeks' laze, he was back at the Depot. Then he got seven days' leave for some mysterious reason (I think there was a draft leaving shortly, and everybody had some leave), and I dined twice with him at home. They had a little house in Chelsea, very tastefully furnished by Mrs. Penrose, whom I now saw for the first time. But I saw more of her that evening than I did of Harry, who was hopelessly entangled with two or three 'in-laws.' She was a dark, gentle little person, with brown, and rather sorrowful, eyes. When I first saw her I thought, 'She was never meant to be a soldier's wife,' but after we had talked a little, I added, 'But she is a good one.' She was clearly very much in love with Harry, and delighted to meet some one who had been with him in France, and was fond of him—for, like all wives, she soon discovered that. But all the time I felt that there were questions she

wanted to ask me, and could not. I will not pretend to tell you how she was dressed, because I don't know ; I seldom notice, and then I never remember. But she appealed to me very much, and I made up my mind to look after *her* interests if I ever had the chance, if there was ever a question between Harry and a single man. I had no chance of a talk with Harry, and noticed only that he seemed pretty fit again but sleepless-looking.

The second night I went there was the last night of Harry's leave. If I had known that when I was asked I think I should not have gone ; for while it showed I was a privileged person, it is a painful privilege to break in on the ' last evening ' of husband and wife ; I know those last evenings. And though Harry was only going back to the Depot in the morning, it was known there had been heavy losses in the regiment ; there was talk of a draft ; it might well be the last evening of all.

I got there early, at Harry's request, about half-past five, on a miserable gusty evening in early November. Harry was sitting in a kind of study, library, or den, writing ; he looked less well, and very sleepless about the eyes.

It was the anniversary of one of the great battles of the regiment ; and we talked a little of that day, as soldiers will, with a sort of gloomy satisfaction. Then Harry said, slowly :

'I 've been offered a job at the War Office—by Major Mackenzie—Intelligence.'

'Oh,' I said, 'that 's very good.' (But I was thinking more of Mrs. Harry than Harry.)

Harry went on, as if he had not heard. 'I was writing to him when you came in. And I don't know what to say.'

'Why not?'

'Well,' he said, '*you* know as well as any one what sort of time I 've had, and how I 've been treated—by Philpott and others. And I 've had about enough of it. I remember telling you once on the Peninsula that I thought myself fairly brave when I first went out . . . and, my God, so I was compared with what I am now. . . . I suppose every one has his breaking-point, and I 've certainly had mine. . . . I simply feel I can't face it again.'

'Very well,' I said, 'take the job and have done with it. You 've done as much as you can, and you can't do more. What 's the trouble?'

But he went on, seemingly to convince himself rather than me. 'I 've never got over those awful working-parties in that —— valley; I had two or three 5·9's burst right on top of me, you know . . . the Lord knows how I escaped . . . and now I simply dream of them. I dream of them every night . . . usually it 's an enormous endless plain, full of shell-holes, of

course, and raining like hell, and I walk for miles (usually with you) looking over my shoulder, waiting for the shells to come . . . and then I hear that savage kind of high-velocity shriek, and I run like hell . . . only I can't run, of course, that 's the worst part . . . and I get into a ditch and lie there . . . and then one comes that I know by the sound is going to burst on top of me . . . and I wake up simply sweating with funk. I 've never told anybody but you about this, not even Peggy, but she says I wake her up sometimes, making an awful noise.'

He was silent for a little, and I had nothing to say.

' And then it 's all so different now, so damnably . . . dull. . . . I wouldn't mind if we could all go out together again . . . just the Old Crowd . . . so that we could have good evenings, and not care what happened. But now there 's nobody left (I don't expect they 'll let *you* go out again), only poor old Egerton—he 's back again . . . and I can't stand all those boot-faced N.C.O. officers and people like Philpott, and all the Old Duds. . . . You can't get away from it—the boot-faces *aren't* officers, and nothing will make them so . . . even the men can't stand them. And they get on my nerves. . . .

' It all gets on my nerves, the mud, and the

cold, and the futile Brigadiers, and all the damned eyewash we have nowadays . . . never having a decent wash, and being cramped up in a dug-out the size of a chest-of-drawers with four boot-faces . . . where you can't move without upsetting the candle and the food, or banging your head . . . and getting lousy. And all those endless ridiculous details you have to look after day after day . . . working-parties . . . haversack rations . . . has every man got his box-respirator? . . . why haven't you cleaned your rifle? . . . as if I cared a damn! . . . No, I won't say that . . . but there you are, you see, it 's on my nerves. . . . But sometimes ' (and though I sympathized I was glad there was a ' but ') ' when I think of some of the bogus people who 've been out, perhaps once, and come home after three months with a nice blighty in the shoulder, and got a job, and stayed in it ever since . . . I feel I can't do that either, and run the risk of being taken for one of them. . . .'

' I don't think there 's any danger of that,' I remarked.

' I don't know—one " officeer " is the same as another to most people. . . . And then, you know, although you hate it, it does get hold of you somehow—out there . . . and after a bit, when you 've got used to being at home you get restless. . . . I know I did last time, and some-

times I do now. . . . I don't say I hunger for the battle, I never want to be in a "stunt" again . . . but you feel kind of "out of it" when you read the papers, or meet somebody on leave . . . you think of the amusing evenings we used to have. . . . And I rather enjoyed "trekking" about in the back areas . . . especially when I had a horse . . . wandering along on a good frosty day, and never sure what village you were going to sleep in . . . marching through Doullens with the band . . . estaminets, and talking French, and all the rest of it. . . .

'And then I think of a 5·9—and I know I 'm done for. . . . I 've got too much imagination, that 's the trouble (I hope you 're not fed up with all this, but I want your advice). . . . It 's funny, one never used to think about getting killed, even in the war . . . it seemed impossible somehow that *you yourself* could be killed (did you ever have that feeling?) . . . though one was ready enough in those days . . . but now—even in the train the other day, going down to Bristol by the express, I found I was imagining what would happen if there was a smash . . . things one reads of, you know . . . carriages catching fire, and so on . . . just "wind-up." And the question is—is it any *good* going out, if you 've got into that state? . . . And if one says "No," is one just making

it an excuse? . . . It's no good telling a military doctor all this . . . they'd just say, "Haw, skrim-shanker! what you want is some fresh air and exercise, my son!" . . . And for all I know they may be right. . . . As a matter of fact, I don't think I'm physically fit, really . . . my own doctor says not . . . but you're never examined properly before you go out, as you know. . . . You all troop in by the dozen at the last moment . . . and the fellow says, "Feeling quite fit?" . . . And if you've just had a good breakfast and feel buckish, you say, "Yes, thank you," and there you are. . . . Unless you *ask* them to examine you you might have galloping consumption for all they know, and I'm damned if I'd ask them. . . . After all, I suppose the system's right. . . . If a man can stick it for a month or two in the line, he's worth sending there if he's an officer . . . and it doesn't matter to the country if he dies of consumption afterwards. . . . But my trouble is—*can* I stick it for a month or two . . . or shall I go and do some awful thing, and let a lot of fellows down? . . . Putting aside my own inclinations, which are probably pretty selfish, what is it my duty to do? . . . After friend Philpott I don't know that I'm so keen on duty as I was . . . but I do want to stick this —— war out on the right line, if I can. . . . What do *you* think?'

'Before I answer that,' I said, 'there 's one consideration you seem to have overlooked—and that is Mrs. Penrose. . . . After all, you 're a married man, and that makes a difference, doesn't it?'

'Well, does it? I don't really see why it *should* make any difference about going out, or not going out . . . otherwise every shirker could run off and marry a wife, and live happily ever after. . . . But it certainly makes it a damned sight harder to decide . . . and it makes the hell of a difference when you 're out there. . . . You can make up your mind not to think of it when you 're at home . . . like this . . . but out there, when you 're cold and fed up, and just starting up the line with a working-party . . . you can't help thinking of it, and it makes things about ten times more difficult . . . and as you know, it 's jolly hard not to let it make a difference to what you do. . . . But, damn it, why did you remind me of that? I didn't want to think about it.'

And then Mrs. Penrose came in, and we went down to dinner.

II

I did not enjoy that dinner. To begin with, I felt like a vulgar intruder on something that was almost sacred, and certainly very precious.

For all the signs of the ' last evening ' were there. The dishes we had were Harry's favourites, procured at I know not what trouble and expense by Mrs. Harry ; and she watched tremulously to see that he liked them. She had gone out and bought him a bottle of well-loved Moselle, for a special surprise, and some port ; which was a huge extravagance. But that was nothing, if these things could only give a special something to this meal which would make him remember it ; for the flowers he never saw, and the new dress went unnoticed for a long time. But I felt that it would all have gone much better, perhaps, if I had not been there, and I hoped she did not hate me.

And Harry was not at his best. The question he asked me I had had no time to answer, and he had not answered it himself. Through most of that dinner, which by all the rules should have been, superficially at least, cheerful and careless, as if there were no such thing as separation ahead, Harry was thoughtful and preoccupied. And I knew that he was still arguing with himself, ' What shall I say to Mackenzie ? Yes or No ? '—wandering up and down among the old doubts and resolutions and fears. . . . Mrs. Harry saw this as well as I . . . and, no doubt, she cursed me for being there, because in my presence she could not ask him what worried him.

But the Moselle began to do its work : Harry talked a little and noticed the new dress, and we all laughed a lot at the pudding, which came up in such a curious shape. We were very glad to laugh at something.

Then Mrs. Harry spoke of some people in the regiment of whom she had heard a good deal—George Dawson, and Egerton, and old Colonel Roberts. I knew that in a minute we should stumble into talking about the trenches or shells, or some such folly, and have Harry gloomy and brooding again. I could not stand that, and I did not think Mrs. Harry could, so I plunged recklessly into the smoother waters of life in France. I told them the old story about General Jackson and the billet-guard ; and then we came on to the famous night at Forceville, and other historic battalion orgies—the dinner at Monchy Breton, when we put a row of candles on the floor of the tent for footlights, and George and a few subaltens made a perfect beauty chorus. Those are the things one likes to remember about active service, and I was very glad to remember them then. The special port came in and was a great success ; Harry warmed up, and laughed over those old gaieties, and was in great form. At that moment I think his answer to Major Mackenzie would have been definitely ' No.'

Mrs. Harry laughed very much too, and said

she envied us the amusing times we had together 'out there.' 'You men have all the fun.' And that made me feel a heartless ass for having started on that topic. For I knew that when Harry was away there was little 'fun' for her; and whether he was lying on his stomach in a shell-hole, or singing songs in an estaminet, not thinking much of his wife, perhaps, except when they drank 'Sweethearts and Wives'—it was all one uniform, hideous wait for her. So I think it was hollow laughter for Mrs. P. . . .

Moreover, though I did not know how much she knew about Harry's difficulties, the 'job' and so on, I felt sure that with the extraordinary instinct of a wife she scented something of the conflict that was going on; and she knew vaguely that this exaggerated laudation of the amenities of France meant somehow danger to her. . . . So that just as I was beginning to congratulate myself on the bucking up of Harry, I tardily perceived that between us we were wounding the wife. And I more than ever wished myself anywhere than sitting at that pretty table with the shaded lights.

Well, we nearly finished the port—Harry still in excellent form—and went upstairs. Harry went off to look for smokes or something, and I knew at once that Mrs. Harry was going to ask me questions about him. You know how a woman stands in front of the fire, and looks

down, and kind of paws the fender with one foot when she is going to say something confidential. Then she looks up suddenly, and you 're done. Mrs. Harry did that, and I was done. At any other time I should have loved to talk to her about Harry, but that night I felt it was dangerous ground.

'How do you think Harry is looking?' she said. 'You probably know better than I do, nowadays.'

I said I thought he seemed pretty fit, considering all things.

'Do you think he 'll have to go out again?' she asked. 'I don't think he ought to—but they seem so short of men still. He 's not really strong, you know.'

So she knew nothing about the 'job'; and this put me in a hole. For if I told her about it, and he did not take it, but went out again, the knowledge would be a standing torture to her. On the other hand, I *wanted* him to take it, I thought he ought to—and if she knew about it she might be able to make him. Wives can do a great deal in that way. But that would be disloyal to Harry.

Well, I temporized with vague answers while I wrestled with this problem, and she told me more about Harry. 'You know, he has the most *terrible* dreams . . . wakes up screaming at night, and quite frightens me. And I don't

think they ought to be *allowed* to go out again when they 're like that. . . . I don't *want* him to go out again. . . . At least,' she added half-heartedly (as a kind of concession to convention), ' if it 's his duty, of course . . .' Then, defiantly, ' No, I *don't* want him to go . . . anyhow . . . I think he 's done his bit . . . hasn't he, Mr. Benson ? '

' He has, indeed,' I said, with sincerity at last.

' Well, you have some influence with him. Can't you——'

But then Harry came in, and I had lost my chance. I have noticed that while on the stage conversations which must necessarily be private are invariably concluded without interruption ; in private life, and especially private houses, they are always interrupted long before the end.

Mrs. Harry went to the piano, and Harry and I sat down to smoke ; and since it was the last night Harry was allowed to smoke his pipe. The way Mrs. Harry said that nearly made me weep.

So I sat there and watched Harry, and his wife played and played—soft, melancholy, homesick things (Chopin, I think), that leagued with the wine and the warm fire and the deep chairs in an exquisite conspiracy of repose. She played for a long time, but I saw that she too was watching. And the fancy came to me

that she was fighting for Harry, fighting, perhaps unconsciously, that vague danger she had seen at dinner, when it had beaten her . . . fighting it with this music that made war seem so distant and home so lovable.

And soon I began to see that she was winning. For when she began playing Harry had sat down, a little restless again, and fidgeted, as if the music reminded him of good things too much . . . and his eyes wandered round the room and took in all the familiar things, like a man saying good-bye—the old chair with the new chintz, and the yellow curtains, and the bookcase his father left him—and the little bookcase where his history books were (he looked a long time at them) . . . and the firelight shining on the piano . . . and his wife playing and playing. . . . And when he had looked at her, quickly, he sat up and poked the fire fiercely, and sat back, frowning. He was wondering again. This music was being too much for him. Then she stopped, and looked across at Harry—and smiled.

When she played again it was, I think, a nocturne of Chopin's (God knows which—but it was very peaceful and homesick), and as I watched, I made sure that she had won. For there came over Harry a wonderful repose. He no longer frowned or fidgeted, or raised his eyebrows in the nervous way he had, but lay

back in a kind of abandonment of content. And I said to myself, ' He has decided—he will say " Yes " to Mackenzie.'

Mrs. Harry, perhaps, also perceived it. For after a little she stopped and came over to us. And then I did a fateful thing. There was a copy of *The Times* lying by my chair, and, because of the silence that was on us, I picked it up and looked aimlessly at it.

The first thing I saw was the Casualty List, buried in small type among some vast advertisements of patent foods. I glanced down the list in that casual manner which came to us when we knew that all our best friends were already dead or disposed of. Then my eye caught the name of the regiment and the name of a man I knew. CAPTAIN EGERTON, V.R. Killed. There was another near it, and another, and many more; the list was thick with them. And the other battalions in the Brigade had many names there—fellows one had relieved in the line, or seen in billets, or talked with in the Cocktail Café at Nœux-les-Mines. There must have been a massacre in the Brigade . . . ten officers killed and ten wounded in our lot alone.

I suppose I made that vague murmur of rage and regret which slips out of you when you read these things, for Harry looked up and asked, ' What 's that ? ' I gave him the paper, and he too looked down that list. . . . Only two

of those names were names of the Old Crowd, and many of them were the dull men ; but we knew them very well for all that, and we knew they were good men . . . Egerton, Gordon, young Matthews, Spenser, Smith, the bombing fellow, Tompkinson—all gone. . . .

So we were silent for a long minute, remembering those men, and Mrs. Harry stared into the fire. I wondered what she was thinking of, and I was sorry for her. For when Harry got up there was a look about him which I had seen before, though not for many months—not since the first days on the Somme. . . .

While I was groping after my coat in the hall, Harry came out of his den with a letter which he asked me to ' drop in the box.' I looked at it without shame ; it was addressed to Major Mackenzie, D.S.O., etc.

' And what have you said ? ' I asked.

' No,' said Harry, with a kind of challenging look.

' Well, I think you 're wrong——' I told him, though I knew then that I was too late. Mrs. Harry was beaten now, finally beaten, poor thing.

' And what are you two talking about ? ' said Mrs. Harry.

' About a dinner, my dear.'

I went out and posted that accursed letter, thanking God that I was not a wife.

XI

HARRY went to France again a month later, after the futile kind of medical examination which he had foretold. I had a letter from him from the Base, and after that there was silence. I even began to hunt about in the casualty lists, but he was never there. And seven weeks later they let me go out again myself, to the astonishment of all but the military doctors.

At the Base I heard of Harry. Some one had been wanted for some kind of job down there, an officer to instruct the Details in the mysteries of Iron Rations, or something of the sort. Harry, happening to be there at the time, and pleasing the eye of the aldermanic officer in command of our Base Depot, had been graciously appointed to the post. But he had caused a considerable flutter in the tents of the mighty by flatly declining it, and stating insanely that he preferred to go up to the line. This being still the one topic of conversation in the camp, I did not linger there longer than was absolutely necessary. Infantry Base Depots are bad places, and that one was very bad; you had worse food, worse treatment, and worse company than you ever had in the line—much

discomfort, and no dignity. I never understood why officers should be treated with such contempt whenever there were a number of them together. If you went about by yourself, or with another officer or two, you had a certain amount of politeness and consideration from military officials; but as soon as you were with a 'herd' of officers you were doomed—you were dirt. If the intention at the Base was to make the line seem a haven of refuge and civility, it was highly successful as far as I was concerned.

I got back to the battalion under the usual conditions . . . a long jog in the mess-cart under the interminable dripping poplars, with a vile wind lashing the usual rain over the usual flat fields, where the old women laboured and stooped as usual, and took no notice of anything. The heart sinks a little as you look at the shivering dreariness of it all. And if it is near the line you hope secretly that the battalion is 'out' for at least a few days more, that you may have just two days to grow used to this beastliness again, and not be met by some cheery acclimatized ass with a 'Glad to see you, old son—just in time—going up to-night, doing a "stunt" on Tuesday!' Yet, as you come to the village, there is a strange sense of homecoming that comes with the recognition of familiar things—limbers clattering and splashing

along, and the regimental postman trudging back with the mail, and C Company cooker steaming pleasantly under an outhouse, and odd men with waterproof sheets draped over the shoulders, wet and glistening. To-day I was lucky, for the battalion was a long way back, resting, so that this home-coming sense was strong upon me. And I wanted to see Harry.

When I came near to the usual main street I saw the battalion marching in by a side road, coming back from a route march. I sent my gear ahead, and got down to see them pass. It was strangely pleasant. The drums of the little band were covered because of the wet, and only the bugles brayed harshly, but very cheerfully. Old Philpott was ahead of them, riding fatly on his mild black mare, and returned my salute quite amiably. I could see a lot of young recruits among the men, and there were many officers I had never seen, but the welcoming grins of the old men we had had from the beginning, mostly N.C.O.'s now, made up for that. Young Smith I saw, in command of C Company now, and Tarrant, our late Transport Officer, was squelching at the head of a platoon, obviously not liking it much. Then came D Company, and I looked eagerly for Harry. Stephenson I knew, in command (how young the company commanders were!), but

there were only two other officers, and they both strange. The last of them tramped past, and I was left silent in the rain, foolishly disturbed. . . . Where was Harry? Ass—no doubt he is orderly officer, or away on a course. But I *was* disturbed; and the thought came to me that if anything had happened to him I, too, should be lonely here, with none of the Old Crowd left.

I walked on then, and came to the little flag of D Company headquarters flapping damply outside an estaminet. In the mess they greeted me very kindly and gave me tea—but there was still no Harry. But they all talked very fast, and the tea was good.

'And where 's Penrose?' I asked at last. 'I haven't seen him yet?'

I had spoken to Stephenson. He did not answer immediately; but he picked up his cup and drank, assiduously; then he kind of mumbled, very low and apologetic:

'He 's in his billet—under close arrest.'

'Under arrest! My God, what for?'

Stephenson began to drink again; he was a good fellow, who knew that Harry and I were friends; also he had known Harry in the Souchez days, and he did not like having to tell me this.

But one of his young subalterns, a young pup, just out, was less sensitive, and told me, brutally

'Running away—cowardice in the face of —*et cetera*—have some more tea?'

II

Bit by bit I heard the whole miserable story —or rather that naked kernel of it which passed publicly for the whole story. I had to make my own footnotes, my own queries.

The first night Harry was with the battalion Philpott had sent him up with a carrying-party to the front line, or thereabouts, fifty men and some engineering stuff of sorts, wiring trestles, barbed wire, or something. It was shell-hole country, no communication trenches or tracks, and since there had been an attack recently, the Boche artillery was very active on the roads and back areas. Also there was the usual rotten valley to cross, with the hell of a barrage in it. So much these young braves conceded. Harry had started off with his party, had called at the Brigade Dump, and picked up the stuff. Later on some one rang up Brigade from the line and said no party had arrived. Brigade rang up Philpott, and he sent up the Assistant Adjutant to investigate. Somewhere in the Arras Road he had come upon Harry, with most of the party, *running down the road—towards the Dump—away from the line.* The stores were urgently needed at the front; they never

got there. That was all. The court-martial was to-morrow.

Well, it was a black story, but I made one or two footnotes at once.

The very first night he was back! The awful luck—the cruelty of it! Just back, in the condition of nerves I knew him to be in, with that first miserable feeling upon him, wondering probably why the hell he had driven himself out there, and praying to be let down easy for one night at least—and then to be sent straight up on a job like that, the job that had broken him before.

And by Philpott! I seemed to see Philpott arranging that, with a kind of savage glee: 'Oh, here 's Master Penrose again—well, he 'd better take that party to-night—instead of Mr. Gibson. . . .'

And who was the Assistant Adjutant? God knows, if every working-party that went wrong meant a court-martial, there would be no officers left in the army; and if some busybody had been at work. . . .

'Who 's the Assistant Adjutant?' I asked.

'Fellow who was attached to Division—used to be in this battalion in your time, I believe—what 's-his-name? — Burnett — Burnett — he rang up the Colonel and told him about it.'

Burnett! I groaned. The gods were against

Harry indeed. Burnett had been away from the battalion for eighteen months, drifting about from odd job to odd job—Town Major here, Dump Officer there, never in the line. . . . Why the devil had he come back now to put his foot in it—and, perhaps—— But I could not believe that.

Stephenson's two young officers—Wallace and Brown—made no footnote, naturally. They had come out by the same draft as Harry, one from Sandhurst, the other from a cadet school; they were fresh, as Harry had been, and they had little mercy. And while I resented their tone, I tried to remember that they knew not Harry, and said nothing

But when young Wallace summed up the subject with 'Well, all I can say is he 's a cold-footed swine, and deserves all he gets,' I exploded. 'You —— young pup!' I said. 'Just out, and hardly seen a shot fired—you dare to say anything about Penrose. I tell you you 're not fit to lick his boots. Do you know that he joined up in the ranks in August '14, and went through Gallipoli, and had done two years' active service before you even had a uniform? Do you know he 's just refused a job at home in order to come out here, and another job at the Base? Does that look like cold feet? You wait till you 've been out a year, my son, before you talk about cold feet. You——' But I

couldn't control myself any further. I went out, cursing.

III

Then I got leave to go and see Harry. He was in his billet, in a small bedroom on the ground floor. There was a sentry standing at the window, fixed bayonet and all, so that he should neither escape nor make away with himself.

He was surprised and, I think, really pleased to see me, for before me, as he said, or any one who knew his history, he was not ashamed. . . . It was only when the ignorant, the Wallaces, were near that he was filled with humiliation, because of the things he knew they were thinking. 'That sentry out there,' he told me, 'was in my platoon at Gallipoli—one of my old men; just before you came in he tapped on the window and wished me luck; he said that all the "old lads" did the same. . . . It bucked me up no end.'

Not that he needed much 'bucking up.' For he was strangely quiet and resigned—more nearly at peace with everything than I had seen him for many months. 'Only,' he said, 'I wish to God that I was a single man, and I wish to God they would get on with it. . . .' He had been under arrest for six weeks, six solid

weeks . . . carted about from place to place like some animal waiting for slaughter; while the Summaries of Evidence and the Memos and the Secret Envelopes went backwards and forwards through 'Units' and through 'Formations,' from mandarin to mandarin, from big-wig to big-wig; while generals, and legal advisers, and judge advocates, and twopenny-halfpenny clerks wrote their miserable initials on the dirty forms, and wondered what the devil they should decide—and decided—nothing at all. All this terrible time Harry had been writing to his wife, pretending that all was well with him, describing route marches and scenery, and all the usual stuff about weather and clothes and food. . . . Now at least somebody *had* decided, and Harry was almost happy. For it was an end of suspense. . . . 'Once they settled on a court-martial,' he said, 'I knew I was done . . . and except for Peggy, I don't care. . . . I don't know what they've told you, but I'd like you to know what really happened. I found the battalion at Monval (the same old part), and got there feeling pretty rotten. Old Philpott, of course, sent me off with a working-party like a shot out of a gun—before I'd been there an hour. I picked up some wiring stuff at the Brigade Dump—it was a long way up the road then, not far from Hellfire Corner. Fritz was shelling the road like hell,

going up and down, dropping them in pairs, fifty yards farther every time, *you* know the game. . . . I had the wind-up pretty badly, and so had the men, poor devils . . . but what was worse, they seemed to know that I had. . . . We had a lot of shells very close to us, and some of the men kept rushing towards the bank when they heard one coming. . . . Well, you don't get on very fast at that rate, and it 's damned hard to keep hold of them when they 're like that. . . . And knowing they were like that made me even worse. When we got to Dead Mule Tree about ten of them were missing . . . just stayed under the bank in the holes. I don't say this to excuse myself . . . I just tell you what happened. Then we got to that high bit where the bank stops and the valley goes up on the left. . . . You know the awful *exposed* feeling one has there, and they had a regular barrage just at the corner. . . . I got the men under the bank, and waited till a shell burst . . . and then tried to dash them past before the next. But the next one came too fast, and fell plunk into the middle of the column—behind me. . . . Three men were killed outright, and those of us who hadn't flung themselves down were knocked over. I fell in a kind of narrow ditch by the road. When I put my head up and looked back I saw some of the men vanishing back under

the bank. Then another one came—8-inch I should think they were—and I grovelled in the ditch again. . . . It was just like my awful dreams. . . . I must have been there about ten minutes. After every one I started to get up and go back to the men under the bank, meaning to get them together again. Every time the next one came too quick, and I was pinned, simply pinned in that ditch. Then Fritz stopped for a minute or two—altering the programme, I suppose—and I got up and ran like hell for the bank. The four or five men lying near me got up and ran too.

'When we got under the bank we lay down and I looked round . . . there was not a man to be seen. I shouted, but at first nothing happened. And, I tell you, I was glad. . . . Some of the men who had gone back, not seeing me anywhere, had melted away home. . . I don't blame *them*. . . . Then a few drifted along from farther down the bank. . . . By degrees most of the party turned up . . . there must have been between thirty and forty of them in the end. . . .

'And then, you see, I knew I should have to go on again . . . get past the corner somehow. . . . And——

'And I couldn't. . . . I simply couldn't face it. . . . Peters (the N.C.O.) said something about "Going to have another shot, sir?" He

was pretty shaken himself—they all were . . . but he'd have gone. . . . We *ought* to have gone on. . . . I know that. . . . But . . . Anyhow, I told him I didn't think we should ever get by at present, and said we 'd better go back a bit and wait under cover . . . some yarn or other. . . . So we started back down the road. . . . The Boche was still doing the up and down game on the road, only about twice as much. . . . By this time I can tell you there was no shame between those men and me . . . we understood each other . . . every time we heard that damned shriek we fell into shell-holes and prayed. . . . They were following us down the road, getting nearer and nearer. . . . You know that dug-out in the bank where Headquarters used to be. Well, just when it looked as if the next lot must come right on top of us, I saw a light coming from the dug-out, and most of us ran hell for leather for the door. Some one was standing at the entrance as we dashed in . . . just in time . . . we nearly knocked him over. . . . And guess who it was,' said Harry, with a horrible kind of hysterical laugh, 'guess who it was . . . it was Burnett—Burnett of all people. . . . He had been sent up to find out what had happened. Well, he asked what the hell I was doing, and said I was to go on at once. . . . I said I was going to wait a bit, there was too much of a barrage. . . .

Then he said, very offensively, he couldn't help that . . . my orders were to go on at once. . . . That annoyed me, and I said I 'd see him damned first, and told him if it was so urgent he could take the party up himself if he liked. . . . But he didn't, naturally . . . no reason why he should. . . . Then he rang up Philpott and told him that he had seen the officer in charge and some of the party *running down the road—demoralized*. So he had, of course—he saw me running for the dug-out . . . though the joke of it is—the joke of it is . . . *he was sheltering there himself!* ' And at the enormity of that joke Harry went off into that hideous laughter again. ' He said I refused to obey orders, and asked for instructions. Philpott said it was too late now, the stuff had been wanted by midnight. . . . He told Burnett to put me under arrest . . . and come back.

' That 's what happened,' he went on, ' and I don't care—only I wish it had been anybody but Burnett—though I suppose he was quite right ; but it makes no odds . . . I *had* got the wind-up, and I *had* failed with the party, and I don't deny it . . . even if I wasn't really running when he saw me. . . . One thing I *can* say—if I did have the wind-up I 've never had cold feet—till that night. . . . I 'm glad I came out this time if I did fail at the pinch. . . . Burnett wouldn't have . . . I knew I was done

when I came . . . and I know I 'm done now.

' But I wish you 'd just explain it all to Peggy and the people who don't know.'

And that is what I am trying to do.

XII

THE Court-Martial was held in an old farm lying just outside the village. There was a large courtyard where the chickens clucked all day, and children and cattle roamed unchecked in the spacious midden. The court-room was unusually suitable to its purpose, being panelled all round in some dark wood with great black beams under a whitewashed ceiling, high and vaulted, and an open hearth where the dry wood crackled heartlessly all day. Usually these trials are conducted in the best bedroom of some estaminet, and the Court sits defensively with a vast white bed at their backs. But this room was strangely dignified and legal: only at first Madame persisted in marching through it with saucepans to the kitchen—all these curious English functions were the same to her, a Christmas dinner, or a mess-meeting, or the trial of a soldier for his life.

The Court impressed me rather favourably —a Major-General, and four others. The Major-General, who was President of the Court, was a square, fatherly-looking person, with a good moustache, and rather hard blue eyes. He had many rows of ribbons, so many that as I looked at them from a dark corner at the back,

they seemed like some regiment of coloured beetles, paraded in close column of companies. All these men were very excellently groomed: 'groomed' is the right word, for indeed they suggested a number of well-fed horses; all their skins were bright, and shiny, and well kept, and the leather of their Sam Brownes, and their field boots, and jingling spurs, and all their harness were beautiful and glistening in the firelight. I once went over the royal stables at Madrid. And when all these glossy creatures jingled heavily up to their table I was reminded of that. They sat down and pawed the floor restively with their well-polished hoofs, cursing in their hearts because they had been brought so far 'to do some damned court-martial.' But all their faces said, 'Thank God, at least I have had my oats to-day.'

And there was an atmosphere of greyness about them. The hair of some of them was splashed with grey; the faces of most of them were weathered and grey; and one felt that the opinions of all of them were grey, but not weathered.

For they were just men, according to their views. They would do the thing conscientiously and I could not have hoped for a better Court. But as judges they held the fatal military heresy, that the forms and procedure of Military Law are the best conceivable

machinery for the discovery of truth. It was not their fault; they had lived with it from their youth. And since it is really a form of conceit, the heresy had this extension, that they themselves, and men like them, blunt, honest, straightforward men, were the best conceivable ministers for the discovery of truth—and they needed no assistance. Any of them would have told you, 'Damn it, sir, there 's nothing fairer to the prisoner than a Field General Court-Martial'; and if you read the books or witness the trial of a soldier for some simple 'crime,' you will agree. But given a complex case, where testimony is at all doubtful, where there are cross-currents and hidden animosities, the 'blunt, honest' men are lost.

To begin with, being in their own view all-seeing and all-just, they consider the Prisoner's Friend to be superfluous: and if he attempts any genuine advocacy they cannot stomach the sight of him. 'Prisoner's Friend be damned!' they will tell you, 'the Prosecutor does all that; and anything he doesn't find out the Court will.' Now the Prosecutor is indeed charged with the duty of 'bringing out anything in the favour of the Accused': that is to say, if Private Smith after looting his neighbour becomes afterwards remorseful and returns his loot to its owner, the Prosecutor will ask questions to establish the fact. In a case like Harry's it

means practically nothing. The Prosecutor will not cross-examine a shifty or suspicious witness —dive into his motives—get at the secret history of the business, first, because it is not his j b and secondly because, being as a rule only the adjutant of his battalion, he does not know how.

The Court will not do this, because they do not know anything about the secret history, and they are incapable of imagining any; because they believe implicitly that any witness, officer or man (except perhaps the accused), is a blunt, honest, straightforward man like themselves, and incapable of deception or concealment.

This is the job of the Prisoner's Friend. Now 'The Book' lays down very fairly that if he be an officer, or otherwise qualified, Prisoner's Friend shall have all the rights of defending counsel in a civil court. In practice, the 'blunt men' often make nothing of this safeguard. Many courts I have been before had never heard of the provision; many, having heard of it, refused flatly to recognize it, or insisted that all questions should be put *through them*. When they do recognize the right, they are immediately prejudiced against the prisoner if that right is exercised. Any attempt to discredit or genuinely cross-examine a witness is regarded as a rather sinister piece of 'cleverness'; and if the Prisoner's Friend ventures to

sum up the evidence in the accused's favour at the end—it is too often 'that damned lawyer-stuff.' Usually it is safer for a prisoner to abandon his rights altogether in that respect.

But that should not be in a case like Harry's. The question of counsel was vital in his case. I make no definite charges against Philpott and Burnett. All I say is that it was *unfortunate* that the two men most instrumental in bringing Harry to trial should have been the only two men with whom he had ever had any bitterness during his whole military career. It was specially unfortunate that Burnett should be the first and principal accuser, when you remembered that almost the last time Harry had seen Burnett he had shown courage where Burnett had shown cowardice, and thus humiliated him. This case could have been passed over; hundreds such have been passed over, and on their merits, from any human standpoint, rightly. Why was this one dragged up and sent stinking to the mandarins? Well, one possible answer was—'Look at the history of these three men.' And in the light of that history I say that Philpott and Burnett should have been ruthlessly cross-examined by a really able man, till the very heart of them both lay bare. Whether the issue would have been different I don't know, but at least there would have been some justice on both sides. And it

may even be that a trained lawyer could not only have got at the heart of the matter, but also prevailed upon the Court not to be prejudiced against him by his getting at it. For that brings you back to the real trouble. I could have done it myself and gladly; if any one knew anything about these men, I did. But if I, acting for Harry, had really cross-examined Burnett, asked him suddenly what *he* was doing in that dug-out, and when he hesitated, suggested that he too was sheltering, and quite rightly, because the fire was so heavy; or if I brought out the history of that night at Gallipoli, and suggested that the animosity between the two men might both explain Harry's conduct in the dug-out, and account for Burnett having made the charge in the first place, thus throwing some doubt on the value of his evidence—all that would have been 'cleverness.' And if I had suggested that Philpott himself, my C.O., might have some slight spite against the accused, or asked him why he had applied for a court-martial on this case after hushing up so many worse ones, I think the Court would have thought not better of Harry, but worse.

Then again it had been fixed that Travers should be Prisoner's Friend; he knew more about the Papers and the Summary of Evidence, and so on, than any one (though as the papers

had only been sent down the morning before, he did not know a great deal). So we left it at that. Travers was a young law student in private life, but constitutionally timid of authority, and he made no great show, in spite of the efforts of the Deputy Judge Advocate, a person supposed to assist everybody. But, as I have said, perhaps it was as well.

For what they thought of as the 'hard facts of the case' were all that mattered to the Court, and as related by Philpott and Burnett and Peters, they were pretty damning. That bit about the 'running' was fatal. It made a great impression. Both the Prosecutor and two of the Court asked Burnett, 'Are you sure he was *running*?' If he had only been *walking* away from the enemy it would have made so much difference!

Travers did ask Burnett why was he in the dug-out entrance; and it showed you what a mockery any kind of cross-examination would have been. In the absence of shorthand writers every question and almost every answer was written down, word for word, by the Deputy Judge Advocate. After a question was put there was a lengthy pause while the officer wrote; then there was some uncertainty and some questions about the exact form of the question. Had Travers said, 'Why were you in the dug-out?' or 'Why did you go to the

dug-out?' Finally, all being satisfactorily settled and written down, the witness was allowed to answer. But by then the shiftiest witness had had time to invent a dozen suitable answers. No liar could possibly be caught out —no deceiver ever be detected—under this system. That was 'being fair to the witness.'

Burnett answered, of course, that he had gone there to inquire if the working-party had been seen.

To do Burnett justice, he did not seem at all happy at having to tell his tale again. If his original report had really been made under a sudden impulse of spite and revenge (and, however that may be, he could certainly have made a very different report), I think perhaps he had not realized how far the matter would go—had not imagined that it would come to a court-martial, and now regretted it. But it was too late. He could not eat his words. And that was the devil of it. Burnett might have made a different report; Philpott could have 'arranged things' with the Brigade—could have had Harry sent to the Base on the ground of his record and medical condition, and not have applied for a court-martial. But once those 'hard facts' came before the Court, to be examined under that procedure, simply as 'hard facts'—an officer ordered up with a party and important stores; some of the party

scattered; officer seen running—*running*, mind you—in the wrong direction; officer 'shaken' on the evidence of his men, and refusing to obey an order—it was too late to wonder whether the case should ever have come there. That was Philpott's business. *He* did not seem disturbed. He even mentioned—casually—that 'there had been a similar incident with this officer once before, when his conduct with a working-party by no means satisfied me.' Quite apart from the monstrous misrepresentation of the thing, the statement was wholly inadmissible at that stage, and the President stopped him. But that also was too late. It had sunk in.

And so the evidence went slowly on, unshaken—not that it was all unshakable; no one tried to shake it.

After Philpott came Peters, the N.C.O., a good fellow.

He told the Court what Harry had said about 'going back to wait a bit,' instead of going straight on when the party collected again.

They asked him, 'Was there any reason why the party should not have gone on then?'

'Well, sir,' he said, 'the shelling was bad, and we should have had some casualties, but I daresay we should have got through. I 've seen as bad before.'

Then there was one of the men who had been

with Harry, a good fellow too, who hated being there. He told the story of the movements of the party with the usual broken irrelevance, but by his too obvious wish to help Harry did him no good. When asked ' in what condition ' the officer was, he said, ' Well, sir, he seemed to have lost his nerve, like . . . we all of us had as far as that goes, the shelling was that 'eavy.' But that was no defence for Harry.

Harry could either ' make a statement ' not on oath, or give evidence on oath and be cross-examined. He chose the latter—related simply the movements of the party and himself and did not deny any of the facts of which evidence had already been given.

' When you had collected the party under the bank by this corner you speak of,' said the President, ' why did you not then proceed with the party ? '

' I thought the shelling was too heavy, sir, just then ; I thought it would be better to go back and wait a bit where there was more cover till the shelling got less. . . .'

' But Sergeant Peters says the party would probably have got through ? '

' Yes, sir.'

' In view of the orders you had received, wouldn't it have been better to go straight on ? '

' I don't know, sir—perhaps it would.'

'Then why didn't you do that?'

'At the time, sir, I thought it best to go back and wait.'

'And that was what you were doing when you were seen—er, running to the dug-out?'

'Yes, sir.'

Well, the Court did not believe it, and I cannot blame them. For I knew that Harry was not being perfectly ingenuous. I knew that he *could* not have gone on. . . .

Yet it was a reasonable story. And if the Court had been able to imagine themselves in Harry's condition of mind and body, crouching in the wet dark under that bank, faint with weariness and fear, shaken with those blinding, tearing concussions, not knowing what they should do, or what they *could* do, perhaps they would have said in their hearts, 'I will believe that story.' But they could not imagine it. For they were naturally stout-hearted men, and they had not seen too much war. They were not young enough.

And, indeed, it was not their business to imagine that.

Another of the Court asked: 'Is it true to say, as Private Mallins said, that you had—ah—lost your nerve?'

'Well, sir, I had the wind-up pretty badly; one usually does at that corner—and I 've had too much of it.'

'I see.'

I wondered if he did see—if he had ever had 'too much of it.'

Harry said nothing about Burnett; nothing about Philpott; probably it would have done no good. And as he told me afterwards, 'The real charge was that I 'd lost my nerve—and so I had. And I don't want to wangle out of it like that.'

That was the end of it. They were kind enough, those grey men; they did not like the job, and they wanted only to do their duty. But they conceived that their duty was 'laid down in The Book,' to look at the 'hard facts,' and no further. And the 'hard facts' were very hard.

The Court was closed while they considered their verdict; it was closed for forty minutes, and when it reopened they asked for evidence of character. And that meant that the verdict was 'Guilty.' On the only facts they had succeeded in discovering it could hardly have been anything else.

The Adjutant put in formal evidence of Harry's service, age, record, and so on; and I was allowed to give evidence of character.

I told them simply the sort of fighting record he had, about Gallipoli, and the scouting, and the job he had refused in England.

I am glad to believe that I did him a little

good; for that evening it got about somehow that he was recommended to mercy.

And perhaps they remembered that he was twenty-three.

XIII

THAT evening I sat in C Company mess for an hour and talked with them about the trial. They were very sad and upset at this thing happening in the regiment, but they were reasonable and generous, not like those D Company pups, Wallace and the other. For they were older men, and had nearly all been out a long time. Only one of them annoyed me, a fellow in the thirties, making a good income in the City, who had only joined up just before he had to under the Derby scheme, and had been out a month. This fellow was very strong on 'the honour of the regiment'; and seemed to think it desirable for that 'honour' that Harry should be shot. Though how the honour of the regiment would be thereby advanced, or what right he had to speak for it, I could not discover.

But the others were sensible, balanced men, and as perplexed and troubled as I. I had been thinking over a thing that Harry had said in his talk with me—'If I did have the wind-up I've never had cold feet.' It is a pity one cannot avoid these horrible terms, but one cannot. I take it that 'wind-up'—whatever the origin of that extraordinary expression may be—signifies simply 'fear.' 'Cold feet' also

signifies fear, but, as I understand it, has an added implication in it of *base yielding* to that fear. I told them about this distinction of Harry's, and asked them what they thought.

'That 's it,' said Smith, 'that 's just the damned shame of the whole thing. There are lots of men who are simply terrified the whole time they 're out, but just go on sticking it by sheer guts—will-power, or whatever you like—that 's having the wind-up. and you can't prevent it. It just depends how you 're made. I suppose there really are some people who don't feel fear at all—that fellow Drake, for example—though I 'm not sure that there are many. Anyhow, if there are any they don't deserve much credit though they do get the V.C.'s. Then there are the people who feel fear like the rest of us, and don't make any effort to resist it, don't join up or come out, and when they have to, go back after three months with a blighty one, and get a job, and stay there——'

'And when they are here wangle out of all the dirty jobs,' put in Foster.

'Well, they 're the people with "cold feet" if you like,' Smith went on, 'and as you say, Penrose has never been like that. Fellows like him keep on coming out time after time, getting worse wind-up every time, but simply kicking themselves out until they come out

once too often, and stop one, or break up suddenly like Penrose, and——'

'And the question is—ought any man like that to be shot?' asked Foster.

'Ought any one who *volunteers* to fight for his bloody country be shot?' said another.

'Damn it, yes,' said Constable; he was a square, hard-looking old boy, a promoted N.C.O., and a very useful officer. 'You must have some sort of standard—or where would the army be?'

'I don't know,' said Foster, 'look at the Australians—they don't have a death-penalty, and I reckon they 're as good as us.'

'Yes, my son, perhaps that 's the reason'—this was old Constable again—'the average Australian is naturally a sight stouter-hearted than the average Englishman—they don't need it.'

'Then why the hell do they punish Englishmen worse than Australians, if they can't even be *expected* to do so well?' retorted Foster; but this piece of dialectics was lost on Constable.

'Anyhow, I don't see that it need be such an absolute standard,' Smith began again, thoughtfully; he was a thoughtful young fellow. 'They don't expect everybody to have equally strong arms or equally good brains; and if a chap's legs or arms aren't strong enough for him to go on living in the

trenches they take him out of it (if he's lucky). But every man 's expected to have equally strong nerves in all circumstances, and to *go on having them* till he goes under; and when he goes under they don't consider how far his nerves, or guts, or whatever you call it, were as good as other people's. Even if he had nerves like a chicken to begin with he 's expected to behave as a man with nerves like a lion or a Drake would do. . . .'

'A man with nerves like a chicken is a damned fool to go into the infantry at all,' put in Williams—'the honour of the regiment' person.

'Yes, but he may have had a will-power like a lion, and simply made himself do it.'

'You 'd be all right, Smith,' somebody said, 'if you didn't use such long words; what the hell do you mean by an absolute standard?'

'Sorry, George, I forgot you were so ignorant. What I mean is this. Take a case like Penrose's: All they ask is, was he seen running the wrong way, or not going the right way? If the answer is Yes—the punishment is death, *et cetera, et cetera*. To begin with, as I said, they don't consider whether he was *capable* physically or mentally—I don't know which it is—of doing the right thing. And then there are lots of other things which *we* know make one man more "windy" than another, or windier to-day than

he was yesterday—things like being a married man, or having boils, or a bad cold, or being just physically weak, so that you get so exhausted you haven't got any strength left to resist your fears (I've had that feeling myself)—none of those things are considered *at all* at a court-martial—and I think they ought to be.

'No,' said Foster, 'they ought to be considered *before* they decide to have a court-martial at all. A case like Penrose's never ought to have got so far.'

'You 're right—I don't know why the devil it did.'

'After all,' said Williams, 'you 've got to consider the name of the regiment. What would happen——'

But I could not stand any more of that. 'I think Smith 's on the right line,' I said, 'though I don't know if it would ever be workable. There are, of course, lots of fellows who *feel* things far more than most of us, sensitive, imaginative fellows, like poor Penrose—and it must be hell for them. Of course there are some men like that with enormously strong wills who manage to stick it out as well as anybody, and do awfully well—I should think young Aston, for instance—and those I call the *really* brave men. Anyhow, if a man like that really does stick it as long as he can, I think

something ought to be done for him, though I 'm damned if I know what. He oughtn't . . .'

'He oughtn't to be *allowed* to go on too long—that 's what it comes to,' said Smith.

'Well, what do you want,' Foster asked, 'a kind of periodical Wind-up Examination ? '

'That 's the kind of thing, I suppose. It *is* a medical question, really. Only the doctors don't seem to recognize—or else they aren't allowed to—any stage between absolute shell-shock, with your legs flying in all directions, and just ordinary skrim-shanking.'

'But, damn it, man,' Constable exploded, 'look at the skrim-shanking you 'll get if you have that sort of thing. You 'd have all the mothers' darlings in the kingdom saying they 'd had enough when they got to the Base.'

'Perhaps—no, I think that 's silly. I don't know what it is that gives you bad wind-up after a long time out here, nerves or imagination or emotion or what, but it seems to me the doctors ought to be able to test when a man 's really had enough ; just as they tell whether a man's knee or a man's heart are really bad or not. You 'd have to take his record into account, of course. . . .'

'And you 'd have to make it a compulsory test,' said Smith, 'because nowadays no one 's going to go into a Board and say, " Look here, doctor, I 've been out so long and I can't stand

any more." They 'd send you out in the next draft ! '

' Compulsory both ways,' added Foster: ' when they 'd decided he 'd done enough, and wasn't *safe* any longer, he oughtn't to be *allowed* to do any more—because he 's dangerous to himself and everybody else.'[1]

' As a matter of fact,' said Williams, ' that 's what usually does happen, doesn't it ? When a chap gets down and out like that after a decent spell of it, he usually gets a job at home—instructor at the Depot, or something.'

' Yes, and then you get a fellow with the devil of a conscience like Penrose—and you have a nasty mess like this.'

' And what about the men ? ' asked Constable. ' Are you going to have the same thing for them ? '

' Certainly—only, thank God, there are not so many of them who need it. All that chat you read about the " wonderful fatalism " of the British soldier is so much bunkum. It simply means that most of them are not cursed with an imagination, and so don't worry about what 's coming.'

' That 's true ; you don't see many fatalists in the middle of a big strafe.'

[1] It is only fair to say that, long after the supposed date of this conversation, a system of sending ' war-weary ' soldiers home for six months at a time was instituted, though I doubt if Foster would have been satisfied with that.

'Of course there *are* lots of them who *are* made like Penrose, and with a record like his, something——'

'And it 's damned lucky for the British Army there are not more of them,' put in Constable.

'Certainly, but it 's damned unlucky for them to be in the British Army—in the infantry, anyhow.'

'And what does that matter ? '

'Oh, well, you can take that line if you like—but it 's a bit Prussian, isn't it ? '

'Prussia 's winning this dirty war, anyhow, at present.'

So the talk rambled on, and we got no further, only most of us were in troubled agreement that something—perhaps many things—were wrong about the System, if this young volunteer, after long fighting and suffering, was indeed to be shot like a traitor in the cold dawn.

Nine times out of ten, as Williams had said, we knew that it would not have happened, simply because nine men out of ten surrender in time. But ought the tenth case to be even remotely possible ? That was our doubt.

What exactly was wrong we could not pretend to say. It was not our business. But if this was the best the old men could do, we felt that we could help them a little. I give you this scrap of conversation only to show

the kind of feeling there was in the regiment —because that is the surest test of the rightness of these things.

They were still at it when I left. And as I went out wearily into the cold drizzle I heard Foster summing up his views with: 'Well, the whole thing 's damned awful. They 've recommended him to mercy, haven't they? And I hope to God he gets it.'

II

But he got no mercy. The sentence was confirmed by the higher authorities. I heard afterwards that the officers of the Court-Martial were amazed and horrified to hear it.

I cannot pretend to *know* what happened, but from some experience of the military hierarchy I can imagine. I can see those papers, wrapped up in the blue form, with all the right information beautifully inscribed in the right spaces, very neat and precise, carefully sealed in the long envelopes, and sent wandering up through the rarefied atmosphere of the Higher Formations. Very early they halt, at the Brigadier, or perhaps the Divisional General, some one who thinks of himself as a man of 'blood and iron.' He looks upon the papers. He reads the evidence—very carefully. At the end he sees 'Recommended to

Mercy.'—'All very well, but we must make an example sometimes. Where 's that confidential memo. we had the other day? That 's it, yes. "Officer who fails in his duty must be treated with the same severity as would be awarded to private in the same circumstances." Quite right too. Shan't approve recommendation to mercy. Just write on it, "See no reason why sentence should not be carried out," and I 'll sign it.' Or, more simply perhaps: 'Mercy! mercy be damned! Must make an example. I won't have any cold feet in my Command.' And so the blue form goes climbing on, burdened now with that fatal endorsement, labouring over ridge after ridge, and on each successive height the atmosphere becomes more rarefied (though the population is more numerous). And at long last it comes to some Olympian peak—I know not where—beyond which it may not go, where the air is so chill and the population so dense, that it is almost impossible to breathe. Yet here, I make no doubt, they look at the Blue Form very carefully and gravely, as becomes the High Gods. But in the end they shake their heads, a little sadly, maybe, and say, 'Ah, General B—— does not approve recommendation to mercy. He 's the man on the spot, he ought to know. *Must* support *him.* Sentence confirmed.'

Then the Blue Form climbs sadly down to the depths again, to the low regions where men feel fear.

. . . . .

The thing was done seven mornings later, in a little orchard behind the Casquettes' farm.

The Padre told me he stood up to them very bravely and quietly. Only he whispered to him, 'For God's sake make them be quick.' That is the worst torment of the soldier from beginning to end—the waiting.

He was shot by his own men, by men of D Company.

III

After three months I had some leave and visited Mrs. Harry. I had to. But I shall not distress you with an account of that interview. I will not even pretend that she was 'brave.' How could she be? Only, when I had explained things to her as Harry had asked, she said: 'Somehow, that does make it easier for me—and I only wish—I wish you could tell everybody—what you have told me.'

And again I say, that is all I have tried to do. This book is not an attack on any person, on the death penalty, or on anything else, though if it makes people think about these

things, so much the better. I think I believe in the death penalty—I do not know. But I did not believe in Harry being shot.

That is the gist of it ; that my friend Harry was shot for cowardice—and he was one of the bravest men I ever knew.

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